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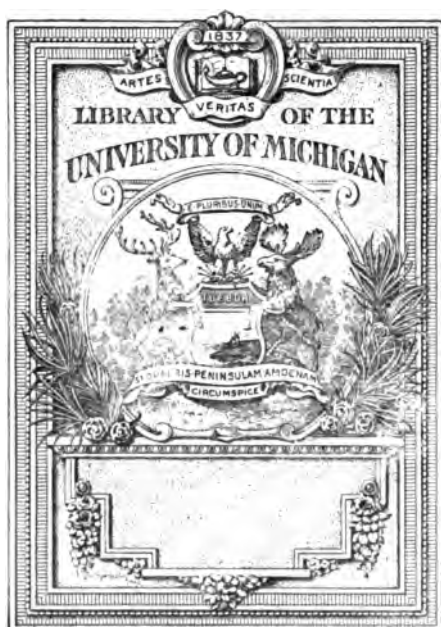
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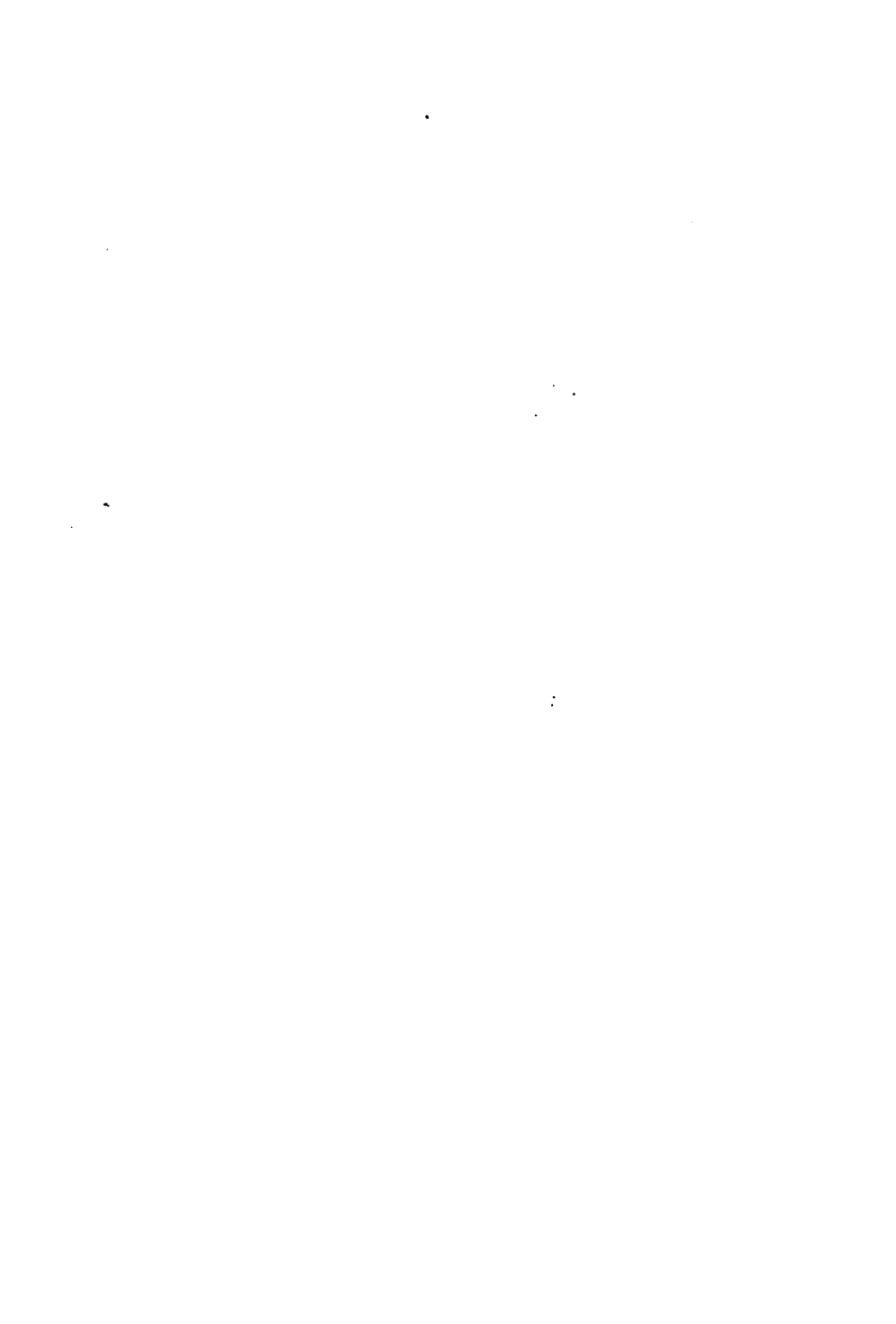
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The MAKING *of a*
STATESMAN



The M A K I N G *of a*
S T A T E S M A N

And Other Stories

By

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New York

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1902

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Published, March, 1902, R.

① J 3-18-65

The Contents



	<i>Page</i>
<i>The Making of a Statesman</i>	<i>I</i>
<i>A Child of Christmas</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer</i>	<i>151</i>
<i>Miss Puss's Parasol</i>	<i>215</i>

The Making of a Statesman

The Making of a Statesman

I

THERE was surprise and consternation in Middle Georgia when the announcement was made that Mary Lou Lumsden had consented to take Meredith Featherstone for her husband. She was the most beautiful, the most accomplished, and the most popular young woman in the State. Such was her native tact and amiability, such was the charm of her personality, that she was as popular with the women as with the men. She had what is called a sympathetic nature. She had broadened her mind in every way. She had taken advantage of the best educational facilities of her day and time, and, in addition, had made the tour of Europe.

The man she had chosen for her husband was, as her friends declared, the last man in the

The Making of a Statesman

world to attract the attention of such a woman. He was at least ten years her senior, and had no qualities of mind or attributes of person to equalize this disparity of years. He was not handsome; on the contrary, he had a gloomy and lowering countenance. And yet, after all was said, he had a certain quality of promise in his features. He was dignified, and he was a fairly good talker.

The explanation that Miss Lumsden vouchsafed to her friends was that she not only loved Meredith Featherstone, but had discovered in him the slowly developing elements that were finally to make him distinguished among men. She was contented and happy, and her friends were compelled to make the most of a situation they could not control. She married Meredith Featherstone, in due time bore him a daughter who grew to be the embodiment of grace and beauty, and continued to wait hopefully for the day when her husband was to reach distinction. She wanted him to be a public man, a statesman; she longed for the day when he would be

The Making of a Statesman

able to rise to his feet in an assemblage and command attention not less by the wisdom and beauty of his words than by his commanding presence and powerful personality.

Her heart was set on such a career for Meredith Featherstone. She dreamed of it, and lived on the dreams. The husband, who was a model of complacency in matters that concerned his wife, read a number of books to please her—"Niles' Register," the "Federalist," arguments on the nature and meaning of the Constitution, histories, biographies, and essays; but there never was a moment when he was not ready to throw away the volumes when an opportunity occurred for him to get the advantage of one of his fellow-citizens in a trade or dicker.

After her marriage Mrs. Featherstone became greatly interested in the college commencements that take place every year. On one occasion, nothing would do but her husband must take her to the closing exercises of the University of Virginia. Once she went to

The Making of a Statesman

Harvard, taking her husband along so that he might get such a whiff of oratory and scholarship as would kindle the smouldering fires of his ambition. In 1853, or it may have been 1854, Mrs. Featherstone, with her husband and daughter, attended the commencement exercises of Franklin College—it is now the University of Georgia—and she was amply repaid for the trouble of the visit, not only because of the opportunity it afforded her of renewing her associations with friends from all parts of the State, but because it brought her in contact with Billy Spence, who, in his graduating year, had become the hero of his class and college.

The Featherstones had not been in the town an hour before they began to hear of the wonderful Billy Spence. There was a deep mystery behind him, and, his admirers declared, a glorious future before him. The mystery behind him attracted attention, and his personality and talents held it. Indeed, there was so much talk of Billy Spence that the Featherstones were compelled in self-defence to inquire

The Making of a Statesman

into his history. It was very simple, and at the same time very mysterious.

In the late thirties the old mail-coach drew up at the tavern in Hillsborough in Middle Georgia with two passengers—a lady, who was very ill, and her husband, who was very drunk. The night was such a wild one that the coach could not pursue its journey, though there was a relay of fresh horses awaiting it. During the night the lady died, and the man disappeared as mysteriously as if he had been caught up on the bosom of the storm and whirled into infinite space. In dying, the lady left a new-born infant, whose destiny promised to be a sad one. Happily, the child fell into the gentle hands of Mrs. Janie Spence, who was with the mother when she died. Mrs. Spence was a widow, who, without resources of her own, supported herself with her needle. In spite of her poverty, perhaps by reason of it, she took charge of the helpless child and brought it up as her own. Her charitable impulse bore good fruit, for her example made itself felt in the town,

The Making of a Statesman

and she was not without assistance in rearing the boy, who had been humorously named William Shakespeare Spence by one of the town worthies.

When the little fellow grew large enough to attract attention, it was seen that he was no ordinary child. He was sent to the village school at the public expense, and when the proper time came, a dozen or more citizens subscribed the funds necessary to send him to college. In the college he took high rank at once, not because he was particularly studious, but because he was bright. He was not a plodder, and it was observed by his tutors that he was not specially ambitious. He was not moved by the applause that greeted him when he made a speech, nor did he seem to set any great store by the reputation which he had gained at college.

His lack of ambition was especially noticeable during his graduation year. At the beginning of that college year Mrs. Janie Spence had died; and to the young man it seemed that

The Making of a Statesman

there was no one else in the world worth living for. His Janie, as he called her, had faithfully fulfilled all the duties of a mother to him, and he had loved her with a tenderness that boys rarely display. Billy did not despair. He had studied and succeeded in his college tasks to please his Janie, and now that she was gone, there seemed little left for him to do.

Mrs. Spence was to have heard his graduation speech, but now she could not hear him, and it needed all his resolution to rise before the swarming multitude—he had never seen so large an audience—and deliver the speech that he had intended to make for his Janie's sake. When he rose to his feet he cast his eyes over the crowd, and permitted them to wander about until they fell on a group of three, a lady, a little girl, and a man of uncertain age. This group was made up of our friends, the Featherstones. The lady, not half an hour before, had heard Billy's strange and sad story from one who liked the young man well enough to tell it well. The little girl had heard it, too; and

The Making of a Statesman

though she was not more than ten or eleven years old, she had the charm of sympathy about her—and she was wonderfully beautiful. Billy was willing to believe that it was the face of an angel that he saw in the multitude. It seemed to console him for his Janie's absence. The face of the lady was even more eloquent of sympathy than that of the child, and was almost as lovely. To this interesting couple, therefore, he delivered the greater part of his speech.

It may be judged whether the speech was successful, not only by the applause with which it was greeted, but by the actions of the students. When the exercises were over, Billy's classmates seized him and bore him on their shoulders around the college campus, yelling and singing the college songs. The procession was made more triumphant by reason of the fact that all the students joined in the march, thus furnishing a spectacle which, up to that time, was without precedent in the history of the college.

The Making of a Statesman

If the speech was a triumph for Billy, it was also a triumph for the tactics of Mrs. Featherstone, who had all along been trying to make a statesman of her husband. The man fell completely under the spell of Billy's oratory. Surely, he thought, if a mere boy can produce these results, it should not be very difficult for a grown man to match them. And, indeed, it seemed to be a very easy matter. It was no trouble at all for Billy Spence to seize and hold the undivided attention of the audience, to charm it with his periods, to convulse it with laughter, or melt it to tears.

As soon as he could, Mr. Featherstone sought Billy out, drew him away from a crowd of admirers, and presented him to his wife and daughter. The lad found the lady charming and something more. The sympathy that illuminated her countenance told him over and over again that she could be to him a friend whose hearty interest was worth having. With the exception of his Janie's eyes, those of the lady were the only ones he had ever seen that

The Making of a Statesman

seemed to hold sincerity always in their liquid depths.

Without any preface or prelude, Meredith Featherstone invited the young man to his plantation home near Halcyondale, and this invitation was warmly seconded by the lady and her daughter. It was the child, indeed, who carried the day. "If you will come," she said, archly, "I'll call you Cousin Billy." She laid her small white hand on his arm, and looked into his eyes with an appeal that he found it impossible to resist; and, instead of returning to the town where he was born, he found himself, when the college exercises were over, journeying toward Halcyondale in the Featherstone carriage.

Wearing his honors with unexampled modesty, Young Spence was duly installed at the Featherstone place as guest. The hospitality in vogue there, quickened by the enthusiastic sincerity of the mistress, was of such a character as to leave the young man entirely free. Emily, the child, true to her promise, called

The Making of a Statesman

him Cousin Billy, and, as it was her vacation time, she was his constant companion. She went with him to the small town not far away; she showed him the curiosities of the neighborhood—the cold well, the high hill, the big loblolly pine, the thicket where a big black bear had killed a man, the stream of water known as Murder Creek—the name growing out of the fact that the Indians had there waylaid and massacred a number of white emigrants, men women, and children. She showed him also a negro man who had been stolen by John A. Murrell, the famous land pirate.

But it is not to be supposed that the little girl had the guest all to herself. She was forced into the background at night, when Billy sat on the veranda with his host and hostess; and oftentimes the talk of the lady grew confidential—as when she told the lad of the ambition she had for her husband; how she wanted him to become distinguished as a political leader, and how she would never be completely happy until he could captivate and hold

The Making of a Statesman

a crowd as she had seen Billy do. Meredith Featherstone, for himself, pooh-poohed his wife's ambitious desires; but Billy, seeing that it would please her, did all he could to stimulate her hope. Indeed, he went so far as to declare that speech-making is an art that can be easily acquired by any intelligent man who will seriously undertake it.

"But the speeches," said Meredith Featherstone, lifting his heavy eyebrows; "where are they to come from?"

"A speech," declared Billy, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, "is a mere matter of moonshine. You string a lot of high-sounding words and phrases together—the sound is more important than the sense—and walk out before the crowd. Then you glance around carelessly, and select someone to make your speech to. Do you know to whom I was speaking the other day? Why, to you and your daughter."

"I told you so, mother! I told you so!" exclaimed the child, clapping her hands gleefully, and blushing a little.

The Making of a Statesman

There was something in the pleased glances of the child that touched the young man deeply; and, indeed, the whole situation appealed to his gratitude. As he looked at the mother and daughter, it suddenly occurred to him that he had it in his power to make them both very happy; and to that end he determined to address himself. This determination was the result of many causes. Billy Spence lived among a people who were able to find something real and satisfying in the ideals of chivalry. A woman's honor, a woman's pleasure, were all in all to them. They held themselves aloof from the spirit and movement of commerce and trade, and they looked askance at what is still glibly called "progress." They had not been bitten by what a prominent Southern man has named the Money Devil. Young Spence was a very definite and sensitive part of his time and environment. The lady and the little girl were fond of him; they gave him their ready sympathy; and to please one or the other, or both, he was willing to sac-

The Making of a Statesman

rifice his own future, which he had never selfishly looked forward to. He had been ready to win fame for his Janie. That incentive having been blown out like a candle, he was ready to relinquish whatever aims he may have had for the sake of those whom he regarded as his friends, and, in a sense, his benefactors. It was a romantic notion, and in the end it caused him no little mortification. With no announcement of his plans, he undertook the work of making what the world is pleased to call a statesman of Meredith Featherstone. It was no holiday task. For hours every day they would be closeted together, and sometimes far into the night. The undertaking had its difficulties, as might be supposed, but Billy Spence kept at it with a persistence that would have been sadly lacking if he had been laboring in his own behalf.

We shall have to judge of Billy Spence's success as a tutor by the events that followed. So far as his personality was concerned, he dropped out of sight and was effaced. Those

The Making of a Statesman

who had mapped out a career for him on the strength of his success in college, which was notable, were obliged to agree with those who said he was a failure. The reports that went abroad in regard to him were such as follow in the wake of all who fall below the ideals they have implanted in the public mind.

Even the warmest friends of Billy Spence began to lose heart. When they inquired about him, the information they received was not reassuring. He was eating the bread of idleness at Featherstone's. Instead of pursuing his studies and making an effort to carve out a career such as his marvellous gifts would have justified, he was clinging to Meredith Featherstone's coat-tails, or dancing attendance on him as a lackey does on his master. Such was the common report and belief. All the high promises that belonged to Billy's college career dropped away from him, one by one, until, finally, it was agreed that he would never be anything more than Meredith Featherstone's dependent.

The Making of a Statesman

Such a condition of things was not uncommon in that day. Kings had had their fools to amuse them, and it was frequently the case that the more prosperous of the Southern planters had about them ne'er-do-wells with a nimble wit and a sharp tongue. And this was what Billy Spence's reputation came to at last; but not before he had witnessed the success of his persistent efforts in behalf of Meredith Featherstone. Proceeding with the approving smiles of the lady and her daughter (the young girl was growing more charming as the days went by) Billy could well afford to shut his ears to the reports that were in circulation with respect to his idle and shiftless habits.

The mother and daughter, it should be observed, had no accurate idea of the nature of the process which they were approving so heartily. All that they knew was that Billy was training the husband and father in the elements and methods of elocution; preparing him, as it were, to make a presentable figure on the platform, and initiating him in the sim-

The Making of a Statesman

ple art of oratory. The public, as a matter of course, knew nothing of all this preparation. Mr. Featherstone went about among them with an inscrutable countenance—but inscrutability had been tacked to his features when he was born, and meant nothing whatever to those who had known him all along.

There was considerable astonishment when, one morning, the inhabitants of Halcyondale awoke and found neatly printed handbills posted in the public places, announcing that Meredith Featherstone would, on the first Tuesday in August, address his fellow-citizens on the various burning issues of the day. As the year was 1856, the first Tuesday fell on the fifth of the month; and the day is still regarded by the oldest inhabitants as the most memorable in the history of that section. There were many surmises in regard to the announcement, and comment was not lacking, particularly as politics was very warm, the issues being practically what they were four years later. The main question was Union or Disunion, and the two parties were badly divided on the question.

The Making of a Statesman

On the day that Mr. Featherstone was to deliver his speech, a large concourse of people gathered at the Bush Arbor, which had been newly repaired for the occasion. This arbor had been erected for the accommodation of the Methodist District Conference; but as that body could not, in the nature of things, occupy it every year, it was frequently turned over to the worldly minded, who preferred politics to religion, especially on week-days. The arbor had been built with an eye to the accommodation of large audiences, but it is very doubtful if an audience as large as that which greeted Mr. Featherstone had ever assembled there before. Taking advantage of the fine weather, the voters had poured in from the adjoining counties, bringing their families with them, and the woods round about the arbor presented the appearance of a confused wilderness of horses and mules, and all sorts and sizes of vehicles.

The speech delivered by Mr. Featherstone need not be described here. It was a very successful effort. It was delivered with consider-

The Making of a Statesman

able vigor and made a profound impression on the multitude. A vein of strong common-sense ran all through it, and there were bursts of eloquence that everybody said were worthy of Toombs and Stephens. It was full of humor, too; the sort of humor that makes an irresistible appeal to a mixed assemblage; and when the speaker concluded, he was greeted with the wildest cheering that had ever aroused the echoes in that neighborhood.

The wife and daughter had seats close to the front, and with them sat Mr. Billy Spence, the dependent. He sat next the daughter, and more than once when her father grew eloquent, or when his utterances elicited enthusiastic applause, she clasped Billy's arm convulsively. As for Mrs. Featherstone, she sat in a state of ecstatic enjoyment from the moment that her husband's triumph was assured; and Billy, gazing fondly on the two, thanked heaven that he had been able to contribute to their happiness. He had no thought of himself. It never occurred to him to measure what he had thrown,

The Making of a Statesman

and intended to throw, away; he was simply filled with gratitude that he had been able to bring happiness to the hearts of these two. He was willing to make any sacrifice to produce that result. Having made one sacrifice, circumstances compelled him to make others; and he went about it with a light heart and a cheerful mind.

The speech was a great success, as we have seen. Mr. Featherstone stepped upon the platform a plain, ordinary citizen; he stepped down a great man. It is fair to say that he put on no airs about it. He seemed surprised, indeed, to find his wife crying when he made his way to her in the dense crowd. For a moment there was an alarmed expression on his face.

"Why are you crying, Mary Lou?" he asked, uneasily.

"Oh, because I am so happy!" she exclaimed.

"Humph!" he grunted, rubbing his nose. "It's a mighty queer way to show happiness—don't you think so, Billy?"

The Making of a Statesman

But Billy was laughing and talking with the daughter, and if he heard the remark, he paid no attention to it. He led Emily out to the carriage, she clinging fondly to his arm, and there they waited for the others to join them—waited, that is to say, until the girl became impatient, for the newly made orator found it difficult to escape from the enthusiastic congratulations of his friends and acquaintances.

Meredith Featherstone now had nothing to do but to follow up his first success; and he did this so well that he soon became one of the most influential political leaders in the State. He ranked with Stephens, Toombs, and Hill. He carried to a triumphant issue the campaign he had begun at his own home. He was elected to the State Senate, where he served two terms. He was energetic in advocating and promoting the secession movement, and when the Confederate Government was organized he was elected to the Lower House of Congress, where he made a record that was ap-

The Making of a Statesman

proved not only by his own immediate constituents, but by the whole South.

With the collapse of the Confederacy, Mr. Featherstone found his occupation gone, but he soon found a field for his activity in the opposition that the reconstruction acts aroused. He refused to take the oath of allegiance, and became a somewhat embittered irreconcilable. His bitterness was rendered more acute by the fact that his wife died shortly after the close of the war. The poor lady had enjoyed the triumphs of her husband more than if they had been her own. Her highest ambition had been fulfilled, and she died blessing those whom she had loved so fondly all her life.

Now, experience and common-sense, as well as the poet, tell us that to this complexion we must all come at last; and so, in the early seventies, while Meredith Featherstone was consulting with some of the political leaders of the State, he suddenly lost his hold upon life and joined the great majority.

Thus it fell out that one evening in the late

The Making of a Statesman

fall of 1872 three men sat in a room that had but one other occupant—a dead man, who lay with a sheet spread over his face and form. Two of the men were far past middle age, and, by virtue of that fact, sat close to the small fire which the forethought of someone had caused to be kindled on the wide hearth. The third man was no other than Mr. Billy Spence, who, having barely reached the prime of life, sat farther back, a position that brought him close to the silent figure under the sheet. Mr. Spence was serious enough, but there was something about his attitude and bearing—it would be hard to say what—that was far from meeting the approval of the old men.

As a matter of fact, the younger man had never quite met their approval. According to their view, he had never lived up to his opportunities—far from it, indeed. They considered that he had wilfully violated one of their treasured maxims—a maxim that had the authority of the Almighty behind it—in the sweat of his brow shall man's bread be earned. Now, if the

The Making of a Statesman

younger man had ever earned his bread in the sweat of his brow, or in any shape or form, the two old men had never been witnesses of the performance. Many and many a time they had criticised him up and down, and heaved heavy sighs over the fact that, although he had been given food and raiment and shelter by the dead man for many long years, he had never turned his hand to any useful employment so far as they knew. He had come into the house a dependent without resources, and a dependent he had remained, in spite of his acknowledged gifts.

And now, when the two old men looked at each other and shook their heads, each knew what the other meant, and so, for that matter, did the younger man. But it was not a part of his policy, nor did it run with his desire, to resent their attitude toward him. He had no feeling against them; he was supremely indifferent to their opinions; so much so, that if they entered into his thoughts at all, he found amusement in contemplating them. The two

The Making of a Statesman

old men, however, mistook his indifference for contempt, and to that extent did him injustice.

All day long the house had been crowded with callers, strangers from a distance, relatives, admirers, and those who take a curious interest in everything that pertains to death and the grave. And numbers of telegrams had come, messages of sympathy and condolence from distinguished men in all parts of the South, addressed to Emily Featherstone, the daughter of the dead man. Many of those who had called were old friends and neighbors, and they had volunteered to remain and watch with the dead; but they were given to understand that all the necessary arrangements had been made, that the watchers were to consist of the two old men who had been in the dead man's employ for a long time, and the young man who had been his constant companion for so many years.

Neither of the two old men made any pretence of deep grief as they sat with the dead. They had arrived at a time of life when Philos-

The Making of a Statesman

ophy, seated in the chair of Experience, closes with a firm hand the fountain of sorrow, and admonishes mourners to be temperate with their tears, since they know not for whom they will weep on the morrow. They had come to know that all events, the accidents that bereave and the maladies that slowly consume, are alike timely and providential.

As for Mr. Billy Spence, if he did not realize that he had been left in a peculiar, not to say painful, predicament, the old men realized it for him, and they regarded him furtively now and then with that curious lack of sympathy that sometimes manifests itself in those who are old enough to know that sympathy can heal no wounds and mend no broken bones. The position that Billy Spence had occupied was forced on him by events and circumstances which he had made no effort to change. He was, indeed, left in a pitiable plight, but such was his temperament that he had no regrets. He had devoted his high talents to promoting the interests and reputation of his dead friend,

The Making of a Statesman

and now, at thirty-six, he was brought face to face with a most painful contingency. Yet he had not a thought for himself; his chief concern was the daughter. He had witnessed her grief with a sinking heart, and his quick imagination, looking forward in the future, beheld her lonely and forlorn.

Emily was now twenty-four, and though she had had suitors by the score, she had turned them away one by one. When Billy was younger, the popularity of the girl, and the innocent pleasure she took in social affairs, had given him many a secret pang, but now he regretted—though the possibility still gave him a pang—that she had not married one of the worthy young men who had so assiduously sought her hand.

While Mr. Spence was busy with his futile thoughts he heard the tinkling of glasses in the dining-room. The two old men also heard it, and looked at each other with mutual smiles of anticipation. Presently Uncle Ishmael, who for long years had been the body-servant of the

The Making of a Statesman

dead man, came into the room bearing a small waiter on which were three glasses containing whiskey and sugar and water. The two old men took theirs without a word, but Mr. Spence waved away the one intended for him. "Drink it yourself, Ishmael," he said; "you need it worse than I do."

"Plenty mo' whar dis come fum, Marse Billy," Uncle Ishmael remarked. Then, placing the waiter on the mantel, he went to the side of the dead man and lifted the sheet. For some moments the old negro stood gazing at the face of him who had not only been his master but his friend. Uncle Ishmael's countenance cleared as he gazed, and he turned to Mr. Spence with an air of satisfaction. "Marse Billy," he said, "he look like he ain't more'n forty year ol'. Des ez you see 'im now, dat de way he look when you fust come on de place. It sho put me in min' er ol' times."

Billy Spence leaned forward a little and studied the face of his friend. Death had obliterated the perplexed frown and smoothed

The Making of a Statesman

away the wrinkles, and it seemed that a faint smile was hovering around the firm mouth. Mr. Spence took advantage of the opportunity to stroke the gray hair that clustered thickly about the dead man's forehead, and there was something in the gentle movements of his hand so suggestive of grief and tenderness that the daughter, who was at that moment entering the room, paused on the threshold, caught her breath, and threw her hand to her throat with a gesture of despair.

Mr. Spence turned as the two old men gave her greeting. Somehow, her beauty always gave him a pang, and she was more beautiful now, in her grief, than she had ever been. "Is this the best place for you, Emily?" he asked. The tenderest solicitude betrayed itself in his voice and shone in his eyes.

"Oh, I don't know!" she exclaimed. "My mind is in such a whirl that I don't know what to do or where to go."

"Where is your aunt?" he inquired.

"Fast asleep," she replied.

The Making of a Statesman

He made a gesture of impatience. "Then you had best sit here," he said.

"No, I will lie on the sofa in the next room, where I can hear your voices. I have been looking over my father's papers," she went on, turning her melancholy eyes on Mr. Spence, "and the discoveries I have made have upset me. Oh, why, sir, have you kept me in the dark? Why have you deceived me?" She advanced a step toward Mr. Spence with an appealing gesture. "It was cruel—oh, cruel!—to permit me to go on for so many years without some hint or intimation. Why, you told me once—a long time ago—you told me——"

She paused and looked at Mr. Spence. He sat with his head bowed, his hands over his face. His whole attitude was one of shame. "I would have spared you," he said, "but you would not be spared. I begged you to leave everything to me—but you would not. Did you break the lock?"

"No, sir; I saw where you placed the key.

The Making of a Statesman

Oh, I was compelled to do something, and I did that. Oh, sir, how could you deceive me so?"

"I deceive you, Emily?" He raised his head and looked at her.

"No, sir, you did not," she said impulsively, after a pause. "Oh, you have forgiven me in many things, and you must forgive me in this. But we—I thought everything was so different from what it is." Mr. Spence's head fell lower. "You needn't be ashamed, sir. It is I—oh, I shall look at everything differently after a while."

"You have been asleep, Emily, and have had a bad dream," said Mr. Spence, rising from his seat. "Come into the next room and rest upon the sofa. Ishmael, fetch a shawl for your Miss Emily; she will need it over her feet."

He took her by the arm, and she permitted him to lead her from the room with a submissiveness that sent a thrill all through him. But she continued to talk about the discovery she had made while looking over her father's papers.

The Making of a Statesman

“Does anyone else know?” the two old men heard her ask, but they could not hear the reply, though they strained their time-worn ears to the utmost. They looked at each other and shook their heads solemnly. Whatever it was, it must surely be a pretty come-off.

“What you reckon she’s found out?” asked one in a stage-whisper.

“The Lord only knows,” replied the other, “but it’s upsot her might’y. Maybe Billy’s been up to some sort of devilment about the prop’ty.”

“No, no; not that,” declared the first old man. “I never seed a livin’ human bein’ wuss tuck down than she ’pears to be. Did you take notice how she ‘sir’d’ him?”

“I most shorely did,” assented the other, “an’ it mighty nigh tuck away what little breath I’ve got left. The last time I seed her talkin’ to Billy, she had on her high an’ mighty airs—but that was before Meredith went to his long home.”

“Well, it’s clean beyand me,” said the first

The Making of a Statesman

old man, still whispering. "He looked like he was ashamed of sump'n, an' she done like she's willin' for to rub the dust off'n his boots."

And so she was. In her young girlhood she thought there was no one like Cousin Billy, and when she grew older she found herself in love with him. Then, later, in self-defence, as it were, she felt compelled to treat him with contemptuous indifference. She fell in with the general opinion that he was a ne'er-do-well, who was too lazy to turn his remarkable talents to account. He fretted her in various ways; but try as she would, she could never make him angry. She was rude to him; she flouted him in a hundred cruel ways possible only to the gentle sex. At times she made him fetch and carry for her as if he had been one of the servants; and then there would be long periods during which she ignored his very existence. He was responsive to her every wish, and paid no heed whatever to her changing moods.

She even had it against him that he had prevented her from marrying; and it was true that

The Making of a Statesman

whenever some lover came a-wooing, Billy's face, with its patient smile, rose before her imagination—and there was no other lover for her. But now——

II

EMILY was, indeed, in the depths of humiliation. At first, when she came to look over her father's papers, she could hardly believe the evidence of her own senses. He had preserved every scrap, apparently with miserly care, and they filled a huge oak chest that had once been used as a clothes-press. Of all the papers that Emily had the courage to look through, not one was in the handwriting of her father. Here were all his speeches, carefully written out and labelled. Accompanying each was a complete memorandum of directions, in addition to the copious side and foot notes in the manuscript. Everything was set forth with the most painful particularity. Here, indeed, were the evidences of a successful school of oratory, and in the handwriting Billy Spence, the dependent, stood confessed

The Making of a Statesman

as the teacher. Here was the raw and the refined material, and it was Billy's mind, Billy's brains, that had carried Meredith Featherstone through the shoals, the shallows, the shifting sands, and the deep waters of statesmanship.

At first, and for some time, Emily felt that she had been cruelly deceived and cheated. Then when the shock of her discovery had somewhat subsided, she began to realize the nature of the sacrifice that Billy Spence had made. She began to perceive the real extent of the unselfish devotion he had shown in obliterating his own individuality, and in putting his own ambitions aside. There must have been, there must be, she thought, some good and sufficient reason for this unheard-of sacrifice. What was it? She went from the library straight to the room where her father lay. As she came to the door, she saw Billy Spence tenderly smoothing the dead man's hair. The sight drove out of her mind the questions she had framed, and, womanlike, she fell back weakly on the idea that she had been deceived.

The Making of a Statesman

It is woman's way to hark back to first impressions.

But when she and Mr. Spence were out of hearing of the two old men, the great question recurred to her—Why had he surrendered his own career to make one possible for her father? Never before had a man, and a young man at that, done himself such gross, such unnecessary injustice. He had received no salary, and his very clothes were shabby. Womanlike, she accompanied the inquiry with a running fire of comment.

He stood before her with his head bent. “I have had my compensations, Emily,” he said.

“What were they?” she cried, her sobs choking her.

“Your mother was kind to me to the day of her death; and there have been times, even of late, Emily, when you were kind. Was there not compensation in this?”

In her agony of mind she could have grovelled at his feet; but instead, she fell on the sofa and beat it wildly with her hands.

The Making of a Statesman

“You are taking it too seriously, Emily,” he said, when her inarticulate cries had ceased. “I would do it all over again with a happy heart if I could bring back the old times and all who were here then. Your mother wanted your father to become a distinguished man; so did you. And after he had entered upon that first campaign, we could not retrace our steps. Don’t you see how impossible it was? Your father regretted it a great deal worse than I did; it was a terrible burden to him from the first. Let your condemnation fall on me, and not on his memory. I am the dishonest one.”

Once more she began to beat wildly on the cushions of the sofa, crying: “And I have been unkind to you! O heaven! have mercy on me! Have mercy!”

He said no more, but stood watching her, grieving because of her grief, his whole being inflamed with love and pity for her. She grew quieter after a while, and finally rose from the sofa. Pausing for one brief instant, as though to collect her confused and scattered wits, she

The Making of a Statesman

went into the room where the two old men were sitting with the dead.

"Mr. Weaver," she said, "it is now past midnight, and you and Mr. Tuttle will need some rest. My aunt will be down directly, and she and Mr. Spence"—it was the first time they had ever heard her call him so—"will sit up the rest of the night."

This information would have been very welcome to the old men if their curiosity had not been aroused, for they were already beginning to feel the effects of the unaccustomed vigil; but they protested that they never felt wider awake in all their lives.

Emily insisted, however, and they finally yielded. As they went along the walk to the gate, Mr. Weaver nudged Mr. Tuttle, and pointed over his shoulder with his thumb. "It's jest like I tell you," he declared. "Billy's been up to some kind of devilment, an' Em'ly wants a chance for to rake him over the coals. I wouldn't like to be in Billy's shoes, be jinged ef I would!"

The Making of a Statesman

"She ain't dumb when she's in a tantrum, Em'ly ain't," remarked Mr. Tuttle.

"No, Brother Tuttle, none on 'em ain't dumb, contrive 'em! but Em'ly has got language enough for the whole settlement. By jacks ef she ain't!"

The two old men toddled on home, glad of the timely release from a vigil that had already begun to weigh heavily on their eyelids, yet burning with curiosity to know what Billy, the dependent, had been doing to excite the ire of Miss Featherstone. Though their curiosity was not appeased, they chuckled at the idea that this man, who stood in their eyes as a vagabond and a loafer, had at last been found out.

Emily seated herself near the fireplace, and Billy Spence sat on the opposite side. She kept her eyes on his face, but never once did he look at her. On the contrary, he gazed at the flickering flames on the hearth and on the queer shadows that they cast. Finally she spoke.

"Has any provision been made for you in father's will?"

The Making of a Statesman

"None whatever," he replied.

"I should have thought after—after all you have done——"

"Don't be too hard on your father, Emily. It was his purpose, his desire to leave me something. But I convinced him that a bequest to me would create talk and arouse suspicion. Why, suppose that you had gone on in ignorance of what you have found out—what would your feelings have been if I had come in for a share—even the smallest—of the property here?"

"I should have resented it," she frankly admitted. "But now——"

"Most certainly you would," he said. "But now you have nothing to resent, and I have nothing to regret."

"But now," she persisted—she was a young woman hard to put down—"the property is mine, and I can do what I please with my own."

He divined—or thought he did—the proposition she was leading up to, and he rose from his chair, his face very red at first, and then

The Making of a Statesman

suddenly pale. "Emily, your contempt for me has been a burden hard to bear, but I have borne it. Through it all I have never had one unkind thought of you. With the lights before you, you were entirely justifiable. But I beg you to refrain from grinding me into the dust. Say no more about property. In the course of a very few days I shall cease to annoy you."

"You know that you do not annoy me," she said very quietly. "What do you propose to do?"

He made no reply to this, but stood leaning against the high mantel, gazing into the fire.

"You are to remain here," she went on; "you are to remain here just as though nothing had happened." Still he made no reply. It seemed as if his mind was concerned with matters and things far beyond her comprehension. "I said you were to remain here," she insisted.

"I heard you, Emily," he made answer. Her declaration brought a rosy glow to her

The Making of a Statesman

face, but Billy Spence paid as little attention to the blush as he did to her words. He was wondering where and how he should begin life again. He moved away from the fireplace, and began to pace slowly up and down the room. Emily, for her part, leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes, while Uncle Ishmael in the next room sat and nodded.

Some weeks after the funeral of Meredith Featherstone, the household suddenly awoke to the fact that Billy Spence had disappeared. The man's habits, developed during the long period when he was engaged in initiating his friend and patron in the arts and methods of what is loosely called statesmanship, were very irregular. He frequently turned night into day; and there had been seasons, as, for instance, in the midst of a warm campaign, when he would lock himself in for days at a time, depending on Uncle Ishmael to keep him supplied with coffee, of which he consumed large quantities, rejecting, for the most part, all substantial food. At the end of such a period

The Making of a Statesman

Mr. Spence would issue forth from his room pale, haggard, and hollow-eyed, a condition that set afoot the rumor, believed by all the household, save the master and Uncle Ishmael, that he had locked himself in to enjoy a spree.

As may be supposed, the habits of Mr. Spence grew regular in their irregularity. If he was missing, no one asked after him, the supposition being that he would make his appearance in a few days, somewhat the worse for wear. So now, when he disappeared shortly after the funeral, the members of the household supposed that he was locked in his room. Uncle Ishmael, for the first day or so, did as he had been doing all along. Morning, noon, and night he placed a pot of coffee, with biscuit and butter, on a chair, tapped lightly on the door, as a signal that the food was there, and went his way.

But presently the old negro discovered that Mr. Spence was not drinking the coffee nor eating the food he carried up, and then he began to investigate. He knocked on the door

The Making of a Statesman

loudly, but received no answer. He knocked again and again, but the result was the same. Then he tried the bolt, and the door opened at his push, so suddenly and unexpectedly that Uncle Ishmael was within one of falling. Everything about the room was in order and in place, with the exception of the few belongings of Mr. Spence. These were gone, and so was their owner. When the old negro realized this, which he was not slow to do, he drew a long breath and shook his head, for he was very fond of his Marse Billy, as he called him.

Uncle Ishmael reflected for some little time, uttering his thoughts aloud. "He gone! he sho is gone! An' ef dey don't keep a mighty close eye on Ishmael, he'll be gone, too. It wuz bad nuff fer marster ter go; but wid Marse Billy gone, dey won't be no livin' on de place." He looked around the room and shook his head again. "I know'd it; I know'd it mighty well. Trouble is got a mighty sight er kin-folks, an' when one come an' set down in de house, you better make room for de rest. Ef I had my way——"

The Making of a Statesman

Uncle Ishmael was going on to say that if he had his way he would scour the country until he found Billy Spence, but he was interrupted. He heard his Miss Emily calling him. She was standing at the top of the stair-landing.

“Uncle Ishmael! Uncle Ishmael!”

“Here me, Miss Em’ly,” he answered, stepping out into the passage.

“Tell Mr. Spence I’d like to speak with him a moment if he’s not too busy.”

“I wish I could, ma’am,” replied the old negro; “I wish ter de Lord I could! I’d tell ’im so quick it’d make yo’ head swim.”

“What do you mean?”

“He ain’t here, Miss Em’ly; an’ ef I didn’t know better, nobody couldn’t make me b’lieve dat he been here sence year ’fo’ las’.”

“Why, I heard you talking to him,” Emily insisted. She came forward and went into the room, Uncle Ishmael following her. “I thought I heard his voice,” she said, turning to the old negro.

“’Twuz in yo’ min’, honey, not in de room,” he answered.

The Making of a Statesman

"Well, I'm sure I heard you talking."

"Yassum, you did. I wuz makin' a speech. It look like it run in de fambly fer ter make speeches." If he noticed how red her face turned at the allusion, he ignored it. "Look at dat room," he went on; "look at de places whar he hung up his cloze, sech ez he had, an' whar he uster set his shoes, an' whar he kep' his kyarpit-sack! Look at um, honey, an' try ter foller in yo' min' whar he gone. Talk 'bout niggers! Ef Marse Billy Spence ain't wuss off dan any nigger in de lan' you kin take my head fer a ban'-box. In de name er de Lord, what is de man got? He ain't got nuff cloze fer ter las' 'im fum here to town, an' in all de time he been here he ain't had but two frien's in de worl'—des two. Marster wuz one on um."

"Who was the other?" Emily asked. Her face was very pale now, and it was plain that she was suffering mentally.

"No needs fer ter call his name," replied Uncle Ishmael. "He ain't nothin' but a nigger—a nasty, no-'count ol' nigger. Ef he wuz

The Making of a Statesman

any 'count, he'd be wid Marse Billy right now. Marster done gone, an' Marse Billy Spence done make his disappearance. Much good his nigger frien'll do him! Yit he ain't got no yuther."

"What you say is simply not true, and you know it!" cried Emily. Her indignation—she thought it was indignation—was so great that she could hardly control her voice. She swept out of the room with great dignity, and went to her own. Whether she fell into a fit of weeping or delayed to bite her finger-nails, it would be difficult to say.

It is sufficient to know that while Uncle Ishmael was still chuckling over the fact that he had stirred the feelings of his young mistress, she reappeared in the passageway, fully equipped for an out-door expedition.

"Uncle Ishmael," she said, "I want you to take one of the carriage-horses, and find out, if you can, which way Mr. Spence went. He may be wandering in the woods for all we know. Don't waste any time, and don't wait; go now, and go in a hurry."

The Making of a Statesman

“ Miss Em’ly, you sholy ain’t gwine out no-whar, is you? ” inquired Uncle Ishmael with some solicitude. “ Kaze I hear Miss Kitty ”—this was the aunt—“ say p’intedly dat you can’t go nowhar inside of a mont’ er sech a matter. She say ef you does, folks’ll do some mighty talkin’.”

“ Let them talk. I am going to ask the advice of Major Perdue——” She paused and looked at the floor, reflecting. Then suddenly: “ No, I am not. Go find Aunt Minervy Ann, and tell her I want to see her. Tell her to come at once if she can.”

“ You sho is sayin’ sump’n now, Miss Em’ly. Dey ain’t no love lost ’twix’ me an’ dat nigger ’oman—her tongue too long an’ too loud fer me—but dey can’t nothin’ happen dat she don’t know it. She wuz here de night we-all wuz settin’ up wid marster, an’ she wanter come in, but I ’lowed dat you don’t wanter be ’sturbed.”

“ Well, you had no business to say anything of the kind. I am always willing to see Aunt Minervy Ann. Go and find her.”

The Making of a Statesman

“No needs fer ter hunt much, ma’am. She one er de kind dat ain’t never been lost.” This was so true that, as Uncle Ishmael went out at the front gate, Aunt Minervy Ann came in at the rear, and it was not long before Emily, upstairs, heard her wandering from room to room, talking to herself.

“Dis is what I calls housekeepin’, myse’f,” she was saying. “Not a nigger on de place fer ter keep folks fum walkin’ in an’ totin’ eve’ything off. Whar ol’ Ish? I bet you de ol’ hoodoo is settin’ in some sunny place, chock full er dram, an’ fast asleep. I wish he stayed up town dar, whar Marse Tumlin could git a chance ter fling a hatful er cuss-words at ’im once er twice a day. Howdy, Miss Em’ly? How you feelin’, honey?” This as the young woman, robed in black, came wearily downstairs. “But I nee’n’t ter ax you dat, kaze you ain’t lookin’ well a bit, not one bit! Well, honey, time you see ez much trouble ez ol’ Minervy Ann, you won’t droop much when it hit you. You’ll be case-hardened; yes’m, dat’s

The Making of a Statesman

de word—case-hardened. I laid off fer ter come out here yistiddy an' de day befo', but Marse Bollivar Blasengame's cook tuck'n run'd off, an' Marse Tumlin had de fidgets. Dey sho had me gwine!"

Aunt Minervy Ann paused and gazed hard at the young woman with an inscrutable expression in her face. Resuming, she spoke in a low, confidential tone. "Honey, dey's a mighty quile"—she meant coil—" 'roun' here some'rs; I dunner 'zackly what 'tis, an' I dunner whar 'tis, but it's sho is some'rs close aroun'. I want ter ax you dis—how come you-all ter drive Billy Spence off? What he been doin'?"

"Drive him off! Why, what do you mean?" She seated herself. Ordinarily, Aunt Minervy Ann would have flopped down on the floor by the side of a chair or a sofa, but now she remained standing.

"Billy Spence is gone, ain't he?" the negro woman asked. "He ain't here, is he? Now, honey, you know des ez well ez I does dat

The Making of a Statesman

Billy Spence wouldn't 'a' gone 'way fum here less'n he wuz driv off. Ef you don't know it, I know it; I know it by de way he use' ter talk ter me."

"Why, I didn't know he was gone until a few minutes ago, and I'm not sure of it even now. I—all of us—wanted him to stay here. He has no other home to go to."

"Ain't it de trufe! Ain't it de Lord's trufe!" exclaimed Aunt Minervy Ann with unction. "An' you ain't know he wuz gone tell des now! Well, dat's one er de reasons he's gone, an' the main reason—an' I don't blame him. I know'd he wuz gone day 'fo' yistiddy, er maybe de day 'fo' dat. I seed him gwine 'long de road, an' he wave his han' at me. He had a ol' kyarpit-bag dat look like it come out er de ark—ef he'd 'a' shuck it right hard it'd 'a' fell ter pieces—an' he wuz walkin'; walkin' wid holes in his shoes dat you could put yo' finger in.

"Maybe I'm de biggest fool in de worl'," Aunt Minervy Ann went on, "but when I seed 'im gwine off like dat I could a fit a cow-pen

The Making of a Statesman

full er wild-cats—yes'm, wild-cats. I speck I know'd Billy Spence better'n anybody else did. I seed long ago—sence Miss Ma'y Lou died—how he wuz gwine ter rack, an' I done his washin' fer 'im, an' I done his mendin'. In all dis roun' worl', honey, dey ain't never been no lonesomer white man dan dat—an' he ain't no lonesomer now, wharsomever he is—dan what he had been all de time."

Seeing that the young woman was not disposed to show any temper, though she had enough and to spare, Aunt Minervy Ann allowed her own feathers to fall, as the saying is. She went closer to the young woman.

"Honey, how come you ter let 'im go?"

"I told you I didn't know he was gone until a few minutes ago."

"Couldn't you 'a' helt out yo' han' ter de man? Honey, you dunner what you done th'ow'd away. Why, dat man—but ne'r min' 'bout dat; 'tain't none er my business."

"Why didn't you come and tell me he was gone?" asked Emily, helplessly.

The Making of a Statesman

"Who—me? Why, honey, I wuz too mad. Ef I'd 'a' come in dis house dat day, you'd 'a' had ter call in folks ter gag me fer ter keep me fum hurtin' yo' feelin's."

"Where do you suppose he has gone?"

"De worl' is wide, honey, an' he had it all befo' 'im, but when I seed 'im last he wuz gwine 'long down de Hillsborough road."

"He was born there," said Emily.

"Yes'm, I know dat, but he been 'way fum dar so long dat all dem what used ter know him done fergot dat he's on top er de groun'."

Whether it was the homing instinct, or a mere accident of his miserable condition, Billy Spence had turned his steps in the direction of Hillsborough. He got along well enough the first ten miles, but after that his energy seemed to leave him, and he walked along in a dazed condition. When he sat down to rest, he found it very difficult to start again. Occasionally he was shaken by rigors, and, finally, a desire to sleep overcame him—a desire that Nature would not permit him to resist. He found

The Making of a Statesman

what he thought was a soft place in a fence-corner, and stretched himself upon the grass with a sigh.

The clouds which had been gathering for some time finally found themselves in a condition to bestow some of their moisture on old mother earth, and this they proceeded to do. They gave forth a fine drizzle that filtered down on the just and the unjust, and, incidentally, on poor Billy Spence. But it made no difference to him. If a wild storm had burst over him, sleep would still have held him in its chains, for he was buried in the stupor of fever. As it was, only the gentle dews of heaven were sifting down upon his hot, flushed face. What would have happened if Providence had been trying to sleep off the effects it would be hard to say; but Providence was wide awake and watchful, and at the proper moment it decided that the proper man should pass along that way. This was old Doctor Tomlinson, of Hillsborough, one of Providence's prime favorites. He was called Doctor Tom, and was known and

The Making of a Statesman

beloved from one end of the State to the other.

Doctor Tom was returning from a visit to a patient in the country, and he was suddenly aroused from his reflections by the fact that his old gray mare—a veteran in the practice of medicine—had stooped stock-still in the road. She had caught sight of Billy Spence stretched out in the fence-corner. It seemed to be a case that demanded her attention. Doctor Tom, not understanding the meaning or the motive of the old nag, slapped her with the left rein, but she switched her tail scornfully, as much as to say that if he wasn't doctor enough to see trouble ahead, she'd keep him there till he found it out.

“What's the matter, confound you?” cried Doctor Tom, with a great show of heat. The only reply the old gray made was to strike the ground with one of her hind feet and cock her ears forward in the direction of Billy Spence. “If I had a shotgun, I'd fire both barrels right slam bang into you!” exclaimed Doctor Tom.

The Making of a Statesman

The gray mare paid no attention to this burning threat. She knew by long experience what a humbug the man was. He weighed nearly three hundred pounds, and, in spite of the fact that he pretended to be angry and out of temper every day in the year, those who knew him well, declared that his great weight was the result of his big heart. What a world this would be if the rest of us deserved such a compliment as this!

Apparently, the old gray mare concluded that Doctor Tom, seated in his gig, with a bush or two intervening, was unable to see what she so plainly saw, so she cautiously advanced a few paces, as if to reconnoitre. This movement was successful, for Doctor Tom was able to see at once what the trouble was. He was out of his gig in a jiffy, being very active, in spite of his rotundity.

“Tut, tut, tut!” he exclaimed, regretfully. Then when he had made a closer inspection: “Dog take me if it ain’t Billy Spence! And fever world without end!” He shook Billy by

The Making of a Statesman

the arm. "Get up from here, man! Wake up! Stir yourself!"

"You don't say it right," said Billy, somewhat impatiently. "You should lift both hands as high as your head—so——" He tried to lift his hands, but couldn't. "And you should be a little more in earnest. Where's your vigor?"

"I'll show you where it is if you don't get up from there!" cried Doctor Tom; and with that, he shook Billy so vigorously that he brought the sick man's mind back to earth again for a brief period. "Come! get up! Here's my gig right at hand. Get up, man, before you are soaked through!"

Billy tried to respond by rising, and he partially succeeded; but he would never have found his feet if Doctor Tom had not been there to help him. After several efforts he was placed in the gig, the old gray mare waiting patiently for this unexpected addition to her load.

Once in the vehicle, the sick man collapsed and lay on the seat. "You'll have to do better

The Making of a Statesman

than that, Billy," said Doctor Tom. "This gig ain't much too big for one, and you'll have to brace up a bit if I'm to get in."

But Billy's mind had run away again. "The only way to do it," he declared glibly, "is to place the emphasis on the strong words, and give the whole sentence the force of action."

Doctor Tom managed to "scrouge in the gig," as he expressed it, and as they rode along he gave Billy the benefit of a very thorough examination. He found that the sick man was suffering from a raging fever, and then he astonished the old gray mare by urging her into a faster gait than her ordinary jog trot.

"They've turned you out, lock, stock, and barrel," remarked Doctor Tom, more to himself than to his companion, but Billy was in a talkative mood. His fever was so high that the whole world was out of gear to him; his mind was groping feebly about in the past.

"There was Catiline," he said, in reply to the doctor's remark. "'Not banished, but set free.'" Then he wandered again, his poor

The Making of a Statesman

brain doing its best to show an imaginary dullard how to make a speech, complaining, beseeching, and sometimes praising. Doctor Tom drove straight to his own home, and, once there, gave some energetic orders, helping with his own hands to carry them out, so that in a very short time Billy was in bed, where he rolled and tossed and wrestled with his imaginary task. In that house he had all the nursing that was necessary, and, perhaps, a little more, for Doctor Tom's wife remembered Billy as a little boy. She had been fond of him then, and now her whole heart was in the attention which she bestowed on him night and day.

Poor Billy's attack was very serious. For years he had been living under a strain, as it were, and in suspense. He had been doing his work in the unhealthy atmosphere of secrecy, and his whole system had been practically broken down before the fever began its ravages. For several days and nights Doctor Tom shook his head doubtfully as he sat by the

The Making of a Statesman

sick-bed. He studied the case as thoroughly as he knew how, and he marshalled all his experience in behalf of his patient; but there was something lacking, something that needed to be done. What it was Doctor Tom could not discover.

On the fifth day of Billy's illness it chanced that Major Tumlin Perdue was in Hillsborough on business. Doctor Tomlinson saw him at a distance, and signalled a desire to speak with him.

"Major Perdue," he said, "why did the Featherstones turn Billy Spence out to grass as soon as Meredith died?"

"Why, I don't think they did," responded the Major; "not at all; quite the contrary. You've got the thing backward. If such a rumor is blowing about, please give it the lie. Yes, sir, give it the lie, and use my name. My daughter and Emily are great friends, and I know that Emily is very much distressed about the matter. Nobody knows why Spence left; he had a home there for life if he wanted it. I

The Making of a Statesman

used to think he was a fine fellow; but he was like a colt I used to own—he had more promise than performance in his make-up. Just give that report the lie, and use my name.”

“Well, Major, you can tell his friends over there, if you think it worth while, that Billy Spence is at my house sick with fever. He’s in a bad way; he may pull through and he may not. I found him asleep in a fence-corner, and he’s been out of his head ever since.”

Major Perdue showed considerable interest in the matter, and, as he was going home, he went two or three miles out of his way to carry the news to Emily Featherstone. By 10 o’clock the next day that young lady was sitting by Billy’s bedside, trying to soothe him. As she entered the room, she heard him pronounce her name. “Emily is certain to find out all about it if you are not careful,” he said, and he repeated it over and over again.

“Emily knows all about it,” she declared, laying her cool hand on his forehead, and

The Making of a Statesman

smoothing his hair as she had seen him smooth her father's.

"I thought so," he answered; "that is why—that is why she——" His voice sank to a confused murmur, and he was soon asleep. He slept for some time; as long, in fact, as Emily allowed her hand to rest on his brow.

"Poor thing!" said motherly Mrs. Tomlinson; "he's called your name ten thousand times. What he needs now is sleep. If he could sleep for seven or eight hours, or even five or six, Doctor thinks he would get well without any trouble."

And sleep is what Billy got, for when Emily found that he slept well when her hand was on his forehead, she held it there until Sleep had definitely taken him in her arms. And when he awoke the next day, the fever had left him and his head was clear; but he was very weak.

He awoke and came to himself while Emily was sitting at a window looking out on the quiet streets of Hillsborough. He looked at her a long time in silence. Finally he spoke,

The Making of a Statesman

and he failed to recognize his own voice. "Emily," he said, "I thought I had gone away. Was it a dream?"

She rose and came to his side. "No, it was not a dream," she replied; "I wish it were."

"Where am I?"

"At Doctor Tomlinson's, in Hillsborough. But you are not to talk. You must remain perfectly quiet. I am your nurse, and Doctor Tom says I am to be obeyed."

Billy said no more, but continued to look at her. In fact, he fairly devoured her with his eyes. At first she paid no attention to him, but after a while she grew restless; then she blushed a little, and finally turned away from him with a little motion of her head that was intended to represent impatience. Weak as he was, the gesture thrilled him. It carried him back to the days when she was a slip of a girl, and he was a young fellow full of life and hope. The memory of those happy days came home to him and pierced him, and he turned his head with a sigh.

The Making of a Statesman

Presently Doctor Tomlinson came in, and after examining the patient, turned to Emily with a chuckle. "You've cured him, Doctor Featherstone," he said. "You've done more in a day and a night than I have been able to do in—let me see—oh, well, in a week. What remedy did you employ? Well, well," seeing that Emily was blushing, "you can write out the prescription for me some time when you are not busy."

He gave a few directions, and went out with a broad smile on his face. When Mrs. Tomlinson relieved Emily, Doctor Tom was still in the house, and as soon as he saw the young woman, he began to laugh.

"Now, what are you laughing at, Doctor Tom? Are my clothes a misfit? Is my hair coming down?"

"No, child, you look well enough to go a-courting; and that's what I think you had better do. That chap up there has called your name so often that if it hadn't been my dear old mother's name, the very sound of it would have made me tired."

The Making of a Statesman

She regarded him with great gravity, this time without blushing. "Do you really think——" She paused. It was a very embarrassing question to ask.

"There's no doubt about it," said Doctor Tom; "not a bit in the world. It's the old-fashioned variety."

This is just the beginning of the story, so far as Billy and Emily are concerned, but what happened afterward may be very briefly told. It was when Billy became convalescent, when he could eat and talk, and yet was unable to walk about.

"I have given you a deal of trouble, Emily," he said one day.

"But if I think otherwise?" inquired Emily.

"You will soon be going home," he suggested.

"And you, too, sir, if you will be so kind."

She was sitting on the side of the bed very close to him, and when he turned to look at her something in her face, or maybe it was only in his mind, caused him to catch his breath. "Emily!" he whispered.

The Making of a Statesman

“ Oh, Billy! ” she cried; and then she leaned over and placed her face against his, a very bold thing for a young woman to do, and yet in this case very necessary.

Just then Doctor Tomlinson walked in. They heard him, but his presence made no difference to them. “ You see, Doctor Tom,” said Emily, as she raised her head, “ I am following your advice.”

“ My advice! Tut, tut! You were administering your famous prescription; and I want to say, kindly but firmly, that if that is your way of curing patients, I'll not be able to use it. So far as I am personally concerned, I object to giving a man such medicine.”

A Child of Christmas:
A Christmas Tale of North and South

A Child of Christmas:

A Christmas Tale of North and South

I

ROU remember St. Ephrem? It is little to remember if you have gone much about the great world. Flavian Dion used to say it was well on the way to nowhere. But Flavian!—well, that man was always saying and doing queer things. On his wedding day he chucked his old *grand'mère* under the chin, saying, “Hello, sissy!” in the English. Think of that, and judge whether such a man could have seriousness when he places St. Ephrem on the road to nowhere. It is not in the way of travel—that is true. But, living here always, suppose you were to go on a journey somewhere—to the fair at Montreal, or to the feast of Ste. Anne de Beaupré: it would be fine, certainly, for a little while a day, per-

The Making of a Statesman

chance; but presently a longing would take hold of you, and you would be unhappy until you came again in sight of the shining spire of the little church at St. Ephrem—the little church that stands in one corner of the garden of the dead—and of the dark green river flowing gently along. Then and only then you would have the feeling of happiness and content; you would feel like shaking hands with everyone you met, even your sour old Grandet, who drove his daughter away from home.

But yet, it was here that Flavian Dion lived. His house is yonder—you go by the church, turn to the left, and leave the village a little behind you. Oh, but he was queer, that Flavian! Of all who have lived here and gone away, he is the only one who has never returned. But he has thought about it; he has tried to come—oh, you may depend upon that.

Flavian went away; he left his wife and child! Ah, but softly, madame! gently, m'sieu'! have no impatience. You know not the conditions.

A Child of Christmas

Flavian Dion was the artist born, having the gift from heaven. From heaven, you say? Well, let it be so. But among those who labor and toil with their hands for the bread they eat, there is the feeling that the artist, the poet, is both light-headed and lazy, having queer dreams and strange fancies. But yes; he is one possessed. With evil spirits? *Ciel!* Ask no questions, or be content with short answers. You may have your own opinions; but we—we who have no time for play; we who dig and plough, and toil and spin; we who sow or reap in weather fair or foul—depend upon it, we know the light-headed and flighty. Alas! none better.

Well, then, behold this Flavian Dion sitting at home while the sun is shining, playing his flute and his violin for himself, his little daughter, his dog, and his pig—the daughter smiling with tears in her eyes, the dog whining, and the pig grunting with satisfaction; or worse still, pouring into their ears his droll tales of *le Loup Garrou*. Oh, fine! yes; and his poor wife toil-

The Making of a Statesman

ing in the fields, or drudging in the house from sunrise to sunset and later.

That was the din raised about Flavian Dion's ears at home and abroad, and all over the village of St. Ephrem. And the good wife made matters worse by slapping the child, kicking the dog, beating the pig, scolding, fretting, worrying with every waking breath she drew. She had cause; but yes—great cause; for a hard-working woman, who knows that her goodman, for all his strength and gifts, is a good-for-nothing, is not to be loudly blamed for any lack of patience or any show of temper. Very well; but could Flavian Dion be blamed for the nature which the good God had given him? And had there not been days long ago—yes, and moonlit nights, for that matter—when Suzette Desmoulins had listened to Flavian's music as if it came from heaven, and laughed at his drolleries until the tears ran down her cheeks?

Well, heaven is over us all, and little enough do we know of its purposes. Working a little

A Child of Christmas

here and there, and idling a great deal, if the invention of heart-breaking melodies is to be called idling, Flavian Dion allowed the din about his ears to grow and increase until Zeph-erine, the daughter, was old enough to be placed in the school of the good Sisters of the Sacred Heart at St. Hyacinthe. Then, having no one to hearken to his flute or violin, or to laugh and cry by turns at his beautiful stories, he took his flute and his fiddle, and his necessary belongings, and went singing along the road to the States. He disappeared and was swallowed and digested in the great maw of the outer world, which, like the sea, knowing neither hunger nor satiety, continues to engulf and overwhelm all who respond to its invitations. He disappeared, and was not heard of again until long after Suzette, his wife, had been laid to rest in the little church-yard. Then, some wayfarer, returning home, reported that he had met the wanderer in New Orleans.

It was queer, the neighbors thought; but

The Making of a Statesman

after Flavian went away, his wife was inconsolable. Her grief was genuine, too, for they do not play at make-believe in New France—they with the hard hands, the bent backs, and the tanned faces. It was indeed true that Suzette was heart-broken. No other ever was or could be as handsome, as gentle, and as kind as her Flavian now seemed to be in the light of her sorrow and remorse. Ah, if the good God would but lead her goodman home again, she would take vows of penitence, she would make any and all sacrifices, she would work her arms off to the shoulders, so that he might have time to compose his lovely music. Ah, just heaven! she would sit and listen to his wonderful stories as in the old days, and never tire of them. She had no thought but of her Flavian, and with his name on her lips she died. It is pitiful; ah, yes! but, after all, life is life, and God is good.

Good, indeed, for there was Zepherine, the daughter of Flavian, to be looked after. She was in the hands of Providence in a very real

A Child of Christmas

sense. This was not her view alone; it was the belief of the good Sisters of the Sacred Heart. She was what is called *une fille de Noël*—a child of Christmas—that being the day on which she was born. She grew with the growing years, and was happy with the rest. She had very vivid memories of her father and his gentle ways. He lived in her heart as a man who was as handsome and as gifted as the prince in the fairy-tales. The melodies he had called forth from his flute and violin still lingered in her ears; the wonderful stories he had told were still fresh in her mind. They were a part of her daily life. They made for her, indeed, a romance, which was not less beautiful because it was full of sadness and sorrow.

She knew where her mother was; yes, full well. Many and many a time she had knelt before the little white cross that marked the spot in the garden of the dead at St. Ephrem, and prayed for the peace and repose of her mother's soul. As for her father—well, at the proper time the good God would take her by

The Making of a Statesman

the hand and show her where he was. She had not the slightest doubt of this, and she prayed that, when the time should come, she should be prepared to follow the guiding Hand. So the years went on until, at last, one Christmas Day, it seemed to Zepherine Dion that this unseen Hand was beckoning to her, and she made haste to obey the summons.

II

NOW for more reasons than one it is to be regretted that Mr. Sanders, of Shady Dale, cannot have the privilege of telling the rest of this story in his own inimitable way. He used to tell it, and tell it well; he gave it a coloring and a humor all his own, and he added to it the eloquence of gesture and the appropriate play of his happy countenance. But such is the pallor of the printed narrative that it would fail to respond to treatment necessary to reproduce, even feebly, the effects produced by Mr. Sanders's genial methods. He used to tell the story with great gusto, and he told it so as to bring out with startling emphasis the main features of the various episodes. More than that, he was able to lay upon it the burden of a family history with which it had only casual connection. He would tell about the settlement of Shady Dale by the Cloptons; of the

[81]

The Making of a Statesman

original deed in the handwriting of General Alexander McGillivray, the great chief and statesman of the Creek Nation; of the antiquity of the Clopton family; of the genealogical records that may still be found in the church under which the bones of Shakespeare repose. In this way he would account for the remarkable individuality of Sarah Clopton, the eldest daughter of Matthew. And such was the art or instinct with which he handled these apparently burdensome details that his hearers never suspected that the course of the narrative had been interrupted.

Mr. Sanders knew, none better, how to work up a mystery from the most commonplace material, and how to kindle curiosity by a word or a gesture. Sometimes he would begin: "Did any of you-all know that we had a Christmas gal in this neck of the woods?" and then again: "Did you ever hear the facts about little Miss Johns, our Christmas gal?" After which he would rub his chin and say: "Well, the most principal fact is that they never was

A Child of Christmas

no sech person as little Miss Johns. You see that house over yander wi' the big, long peazzer an' the tall, red chimbleys? She lives right thar, an' sh's rockin' 'long purty comfortubble, considerin' all the ups an' downs an' drawbacks she's had to endoyre." The person whose curiosity would fail to respond to such a sharp fillip as that, is certainly to be pitied.

Well, first and foremost, there was Sarah Clopton, who, in 1859, was mistress and manager of Shady Dale. As age crept slowly upon him, Matthew Clopton had gradually surrendered the management of his domain into the hands of his daughter, who had early developed executive abilities of the rarest kind. This daughter had never married. The years of her young womanhood had been given to the rearing of her nephew, Francis Bethune, and to this task she had devoted the largest part of her time and quite the largest share of her affections. At forty, Sarah Clopton still preserved much of the beauty of her younger days. Time had neither dimmed the lustre of

The Making of a Statesman

her eyes nor marred her features, and there was a mature, an almost masculine strength in her face that gave an added charm to her conversation.

It cannot be said that Sarah Clopton was lonely, for she had large resources and exacting duties to fall back upon. What she longed for and most needed was companionship. There are moments when the busiest of women are thrown back upon themselves—intervals when their natures demand communication with some thoroughly congenial person. This was eminently true of Sarah Clopton. Francis Bethune had arrived at an age when he could be depended on to take care of himself, and it was not to be supposed that he would continue to hang to the apron-strings of his aunt.

Besides Francis Bethune, there was Elsie Clopton, the young widow of Sarah's brother, McGillivray Clopton; but there were streaks of frivolity and folly in the character of Elsie that the elder woman found unbearable. A widow with the airs, ways, and romantic notions of a

A Child of Christmas

school-girl is not the most attractive person in the world; and Elsie was hopelessly given over to the cheap and childish folderol that is sometimes observable in silly girls, but is rarely to be seen in those who have passed through the enlightening experience of marriage and bereavement. The young widow had some attractive qualities, but none that so far offset her silly romancing as to commend her to Sarah Clopton's intimate friendship.

Then there were Doctor Randolph Dorrington and his daughter Nan. Both of these were indeed the objects of Sarah Clopton's affectionate appreciation, but they were what they were: one a practising physician, busy sometimes day and night, the other the most delicious and surprising little girl in the world — and not so small, either, when you came to think about it, but bubbling over with the high spirits of a joyous and innocent youth.

Moved, therefore, by an impulse which she could not have explained if she had tried, Sarah Clopton caused an advertisement to be insert-

The Making of a Statesman

ed in the *Malvern Recorder*. This notice was worded to the following effect:

WANTED, by a middle-aged lady of means, a companion. A young woman of education and refinement, and possessed of some musical accomplishments, preferred. The position will not be a servile one. Applicant should come well recommended.

To this were added the necessary details covering the address.

It seems that no sooner had the advertisement appeared than Providence intervened and began to take a hand in the matter. A few days after the notice appeared in the *Malvern* newspaper, Father Martin, who had charge of the small Catholic community in that city, gave entertainment to a missionary priest, who was on his way to Canada from New Orleans. To the care of his guest Father Martin intrusted a trifling souvenir, to be delivered to the Mother Superior of the Convent of the Sacred Heart at St. Hyacinthe. At this convent Father Martin's only sister had died while attending the school. The letters of

A Child of Christmas

the young girl had betrayed such love and devotion for the gentle women who taught her, and especially for the Mother Superior, that her brother took advantage of the opportunity to send some small token of his gratitude.

Whatever the token may have been, he wrapped it in a copy of the *Malvern Recorder*, tied the bundle neatly, and saw that his guest placed it safely in his travelling satchel. This particular copy of the *Recorder* contained Sarah Clopton's advertisement. The souvenir reached its destination in due time, and was received with pious appreciation. Then, when the Mother Superior was finding a place for it, where it would remind her of the sender, and especially of the young girl, dead long ago, one of the Sisters, moved by curiosity, smoothed the wrinkles and creases of the wrapper, and almost the first thing on which her eyes fell was the advertisement of Sarah Clopton. She called to Zepherine Dion, and, for brevity's sake, turned the matter

The Making of a Statesman

rapidly into French, though Zepherine could read and write English fairly well.

"It is on the way to New Orleans," the Sister suggested. Now, this was intended as a piece of pleasantry, all the Sisters knowing of Zepherine's expressed purpose to go in search of her father when the opportune moment should arrive. To the surprise of the Sister, and, indeed, of all, Zepherine took the suggestion seriously.

"But yes, my Sister," she remarked with gentle gravity, "it is true. It is on the way there. Do I go by your advice?"

"Silly child!" the Sister cried, taken aback; "you will do nothing of the kind. You take me too seriously."

Zepherine shook her head solemnly. "No, my Sister; to-day I am eighteen. I have finished here. Now I must find my dear father. He is there." She waved her hand toward the south.

"Oh, folly, folly!" cried the Sister, alarmed at the serious attitude of the girl. "You

A Child of Christmas

know not where your father is, the poor man. Perhaps the good God has taken him; you know not."

"But I feel that he is there, my Sister," Zepherine persisted. "Hourly I pray to be set right; but it is always the same. I have the strong feeling that he is there waiting for me, my Sister."

"But will you have reason, silly child?" cried the Sister. She felt that she had made a serious mistake in calling Zepherine's attention to the advertisement.

"It is reasonable, my Sister, to have the strong desire to find my dear father," replied Zepherine.

At any rate, it seemed reasonable to the girl; and as she was to go away from the convent and out into the world in any event, the Mother Superior decided to take the matter into her own hands, and, if everything should be found to be favorable, to forward the hopes and desires of Zepherine Dion. So she wrote to Father Martin at Malvern, making such in-

The Making of a Statesman

quiries as the nature of the case and her strong interest in the girl called for. Father Martin knew the Cloptons well, and he lost no time in placing in the Mother Superior's hands such information as was calculated to set her mind at rest. So, at last, after considerable correspondence, and many long days that seemed interminable to Zepherine, the matter was arranged definitely, and the young girl came south to begin, as she thought, the search for her father, who was the one precious memory of her childhood.

It was Christmas Day when the *Malvern Recorder* was opened and read in the convent at St. Hyacinthe, but it was the beginning of summer before Zepherine reached Shady Dale, the reason being that stage-coaches were more popular in 1860 than they are to-day. As for Zepherine, she felt she was taking a long step in the direction of her father, and there was never a moment when she regretted it, save during the last hour of her journey, when depression seized her, and all sorts of doubts and

A Child of Christmas

fears and grim forebodings took possession of her mind. But, after all, matters fell out very well. It was like coming home, only it was different—oh, quite different; for who could have dreamed that Sarah Clopton would take the girl in her arms at the first moment of their meeting?

“Ah, my dear,” she said afterward, “it was very fortunate for you and for me that you came upon me just when you did. Five minutes later I should have shaken you coldly by the hand, and begged you to take off your things, as we say in Georgia, and then and there I should have plied you with a hundred and one impertinent questions. Did I ask you about yourself at all?”

“Except so—if I was tired,” replied Zephherine. “You had not the time,” she went on, laughing and blushing. “I told you everything. It was like meeting the dear friend you have not seen for long—oh, so long!”

The little French Canadienne, shy as a wood blossom, very quickly made a place for herself

The Making of a Statesman

in the hearts of those who came to know her well. She was timid and sensitive to a degree, and yet had a certain form of pride that stood her in good stead. For one thing, this pride compelled her to learn English very rapidly; and there was a certain daintiness in her way of speaking the difficult tongue that tickled Mr. Billy Sanders immensely.

"Be jigged ef she don't know the dictionary by heart!" he declared on one occasion. "She's like the gal in the candy-store that guesses what you want by the way your mouth dribbles. This French girl picks out the purtiest words you ever heard in all your born days. You mayn't have heard 'em before, but your reason tells you that they're the identical words that ever'body would pick out ef they know'd how purty they sounded."

And there was a good deal of truth in what Mr. Sanders said, and he was partly responsible for it. With no particular knowledge of literary English, Mr. Sanders, nevertheless, had a very keen ear for the vernacular, and a broad

A Child of Christmas

smile used to spread over his benevolent countenance when Zepherine tripped in her English. There were times when she thought she hated Mr. Sanders, but his smiles spurred her on until she came to handle the vernacular much more correctly than any of her acquaintances—but always with a quaint accent, which Nan Dorrington thought the most beautiful sound her ears had ever heard.

Mr. Sanders used to contend that he had but three weaknesses—Nan, Zepherine, and John Barleycorn. Nan, who was only thirteen, spent more than two-thirds of her waking thoughts in the land of romance. To her Zepherine was a beautiful girl who was the victim of some malicious fairy. She would find her father, and then the spell would be broken. If she didn't become a princess, she would at least marry some handsome young man, and be happy forever after. As for Mr. Sanders, Nan regarded him as a man who could work magic. If he had turned into a beautiful prince right before her eyes, she would not have been in the least

The Making of a Statesman

surprised. She knew perfectly well that he could find Zepherine's father, or tell her how to find him, whenever he thought the proper time had come. Such was her confidence in the powers of Mr. Sanders that she used to say to him when they were alone together: "Don't let's find Miss Johns's father too soon; she might go away."

"That's a fact," Mr. Sanders would reply; "let's put it off jest as long as we can in jestice to her feelin's. Let's git her fixed so she'll have to stay, an' then we'll go git her daddy, wharever he is, an' fetch him home to her."

Mr. Sanders always humored Nan's romances; for she was a sort of a fairy herself, and could change from a dreaming girl into the worst sort of a tomboy in two shakes of a sheep's tail, as Mr. Sanders put it. When her mischievousness became unendurable, Mr. Sanders had a way of making a very demure young woman of the child. "Don't be sech a rowdy, Nan," he would say. "Frank Be-thune owes you a whippin', an' I'll make him

A Child of Christmas

pay you off ef you don't behave." The mention of Bethune's name always had a sobering effect on Nan. The two were supposed to be sworn enemies, and were not even on speaking terms.

After the advent of Zepherine, the old Clopton homestead no longer had an empty appearance. Nan came every day, and in fact spent more than half of her time there; and Sarah Clopton concluded that she had made a very profitable investment when she paid the Malvern editor seventy-five cents for the advertisement which brought Zepherine into the house.

Mr. Sanders took a great fancy to the stranger from the first. It was a favorite remark of his that " ef you'll bile your ches'nuts, the worrums won't bite you," and not infrequently he would add the information that " they's diff'rent kinds of ches'nuts an' a heap of ways to bile 'em." A little reflection will show that the original maxim, when viewed in the light of Mr. Sanders's footnote of explanation, covers a multitude of instances, both

The Making of a Statesman

ancient and modern. The reference is appropriate here for the reason that Mr. Sanders, as soon as he became fairly well acquainted with Zepherine, laid his broad hand on her shoulder, saying: "Honey, it looks to me mighty like all your ches'nuts is purty well biled; ef they ain't, here's what'll help you to bile the rest on 'em."

Of course this was worse than Greek to Zepherine, but she was fully enlightened when the old man drew her gently toward him, as she had seen him draw Nan, and said, "I'll be your pappy, honey, till you find a better one." She knew from the kindly light in the clear and honest blue eyes that looked into hers that Mr. Sanders had pledged to her both his friendship and his protection; and it was very pleasant to have it so. She knew that it would be a very easy matter to become fond of the tender-hearted old Georgian. But, after Sarah Clifton, the dearest friend that Zepherine found in her new surroundings was Nan Dorrington. Verging on to fourteen, Nan was still a child.

A Child of Christmas

It could be coldly said that she was no beauty; yet she was lovely in her artlessness and simplicity, and was as graceful as some wild thing fresh from the woods or fields. Her face glowed with health and high spirits, and was full of intimations of mischief; and no one knew whether these intimations peeped from the dimples in her cheeks, or lurked in the laughing corners of her rosy lips, or sparkled in the brown eyes veiled with long, dark lashes. As tricky as Ariel, her hoyden ways rhymed true to mirth and innocence.

Nan was not always hot-foot in pursuit of fun and mischief. No, indeed! There were long hours when she would sit and watch Zepherine at her 'broidery work—watch the white floss grow into beautiful shapes, butterflies hovering over lilies of the valley, and delicate vines weaving themselves into beautiful wreaths. And at such times it would have been a wonder if Sarah Clopton or Mr. Sanders were not also engaged in watching the deft fingers weaving the figures.

The Making of a Statesman

On one occasion, when Mr. Sanders was watching the fairy-like work, Zepherine raised her eyes and cried: "Oh, they have change my name! I think it is too bad."

Nan, who was also sitting near, smiled faintly as she caught the eye of Mr. Sanders. "Yes," she replied; "your name is Miss Johns. I think it very pretty—I called you Miss Johns from the first."

"But Johns is not Dion; I think it is cruel," protested Zepherine. "How will my dear father know me as Miss Johns?"

"Well, I'll tell you, honey," said Mr. Sanders; "the way you pernounce the two names makes 'em sound jest like they was twins. Don't you be afeared about your pappy not knowin' you. Ef they's any trouble about it, I'll interduce you to him."

Zepherine hardly knew whether to laugh or cry; and before she could make up her mind to do either, Sarah Clopton, who had heard a part of the conversation, remarked that Mr. Sanders had a very bad habit of changing

A Child of Christmas

names, and she reminded him of the havoc he had played with the family name of poor old Peter Valicombe.

“ Well, to my mind, Sarah, I holp him out’n a mighty big difficulty.” But it was plain that he had little relish for the subject.

The reference to the matter, however, kindled the curiosity of both Zepherine and Nan, and they insisted on knowing all the facts in the case. Mr. Sanders arose, cleared his throat, and said he believed he would go out and see which way the wind was blowing. Nan jumped up and caught him, and made him sit down again, and he proceeded to tell them how the family name of poor Peter Valicombe had been so changed that none of the friends of his youth would know him if they should meet him in the road. It was, indeed, a peculiar episode, and one that had far-reaching results. One of these results, it may be said, bore directly on the fortunes of Zepherine Dion and in a way as curious as could be imagined.

In 1858, Mr. Valicombe was the only

The Making of a Statesman

shoemaker in Harmony Grove, the little town to which Shady Dale lies adjacent; in 1870, he was the proprietor of a shoe and leather store there; and yet Mr. Sanders could have said of him, as he frequently said of Miss Johns, that there was never any such person in Harmony Grove. The explanation is very simple, and it is also very characteristic of a neighborhood where humor ran riot from year's end to year's end. When Mr. Valicombe went to Harmony Grove, in 1858, the small tin sign that hung over the door of his modest shop bore this inscription: "Pierre Bienvenue, Boot and Shoe Maker." The name, with its alien tang, attracted the attention of Mr. Sanders the very day the shoemaker began to ply his trade in the town. Forthwith, the humor-loving Georgian went into the shop and engaged in friendly conversation with the newcomer. His first remark was characteristic. "Why, you ain't much bigger'n your name," he exclaimed.

"Oh, some bigger—you thing so?" smil-

A Child of Christmas

have the soles on at once, before popsy discovered that she had failed to obey him. Nothing would satisfy her but an immediate visit to the shop of Mr. Valicombe, and of course Zepherine must accompany her. When this was all settled Mr. Sanders said he'd go along to keep Nan straight and to prevent her from begging the clerks in the stores for candy. Nan made a low courtesy to Mr. Sanders and thanked him for his slander. She was now nearly fourteen, and whatever she had done when she was a child, she would have everybody to know that she was far above begging candy from any person, much less a silly clerk in a store.

Well, the trio went to Mr. Valicombe's shop, and he was not there; his prosperity had reached such a point that he was able to employ a journeyman or two, and at this particular time he was on a visit to his old home in New Orleans. But he would soon be back—if not to-morrow, certainly the next day.

Zepherine was plainly disappointed, and Nan was really angry; but Mr. Sanders remarked

The Making of a Statesman

ing. "How do you call your name?" The Georgian was persistent.

"'Ow I call my name, me? Bienvenue—Pierre Bienvenue."

"You'll never git me out of the bog at that gait," remarked Mr. Sanders. "What is the English of your name? Give it to me in plain Georgy talk."

The shoemaker paused again, scratched his head with the point of his awl, and reflected. Finally he made reply, but whether he answered, "Peter Velcoom," or "Vailcoom," makes little difference. What he tried to say was "Peter Welcome," but Mr. Sanders didn't understand it that way; and when he issued forth from the shop he carried in his mind the name—Valicombe—by which the shoemaker and his descendants were to be known in that region henceforth. Such a thing could not have occurred in a community or a section less given over to humor. As the name fell from the lips of Mr. Sanders, so it has been preserved. Forty years have served to change

A Child of Christmas

the map of the world and to alter the destinies of nations, but they have failed to expunge a single letter of the name which Mr. Sanders so generously bestowed on the little French shoemaker at Harmony Grove.

Now, the most interesting part of this recital, so far as Zepherine was concerned, was the fact that the Frenchman was still in the village, and that he was from New Orleans, where her dear father had been seen a few years before. It was interesting—yes, indeed, it was important—to know that there was someone close at hand who had been in the same city with her father, and had probably met him, or passed him on the street. This was something—oh, a great deal—and, fortunately, Nan thought so, too. Sarah Clopton was not enthusiastic, but she said nothing to cast the cloud of doubt over Zepherine's hopes. As for Mr. Sanders, he was of the opinion, as he expressed it, that if there wasn't but one chance in a hundred, it was a mighty big chance; and then he went on to philosophize about it, re-

The Making of a Statesman

marking that, through his neighbors and acquaintances, a man is brought in mighty close touch with the rest of the world; "them that one man don't know the rest on 'em does, an' so on an' so on an' so forth, world wi'out eend."

In fine, Mr. Sanders, who was of a very sanguine temperament, gave little Miss Johns great cause to hope that Peter Valicombe would be able to give her valuable information of some sort. Nevertheless, Nan Dorrington was more enthusiastic than all of them put together. She was in her element when a mystery was on foot. She was perfectly sure that Mr. Valicombe, even if his name had been changed, could tell Zepherine something about her father; and why not go to see him at once? Yes, why not? Nan had a pair of shoes that needed new soles, and she'd have them fixed without delay. In fact, since she came to think about it, her father had told her positively to have new soles placed on the shoes, and she had forgotten all about it.

The case became very urgent. She must

A Child of Christmas

have the soles on at once, before popsy discovered that she had failed to obey him. Nothing would satisfy her but an immediate visit to the shop of Mr. Valicombe, and of course Zepherine must accompany her. When this was all settled Mr. Sanders said he'd go along to keep Nan straight and to prevent her from begging the clerks in the stores for candy. Nan made a low courtesy to Mr. Sanders and thanked him for his slander. She was now nearly fourteen, and whatever she had done when she was a child, she would have everybody to know that she was far above begging candy from any person, much less a silly clerk in a store.

Well, the trio went to Mr. Valicombe's shop, and he was not there; his prosperity had reached such a point that he was able to employ a journeyman or two, and at this particular time he was on a visit to his old home in New Orleans. But he would soon be back—if not to-morrow, certainly the next day.

Zepherine was plainly disappointed, and Nan was really angry; but Mr. Sanders remarked

The Making of a Statesman

that it was very lucky that Peter had taken a notion to go back home on a visit. It might be, he said, that he would be able to give Miss Johns the very latest information about her pappy.

The next day and the next Nan made it her business to watch the old stage-coach as it came in from Malvern, and on the third day she noted that Mr. Valicombe arrived in it, being the only passenger. He had no sooner alighted at the tavern than Nan pounced upon him, and blithely informed him that a beautiful young lady had been trying to make his acquaintance. No; she wouldn't tell who it was, but it was a young lady who spoke French, and who intended to ask Mr. Valicombe a very important question, and he must be sure to give her a favorable answer. Naturally this puzzled the simple-minded old Frenchman, and this was precisely what Nan, delighting in mysteries, had intended to do.

The next day, when Zepherine and Nan called to see Mr. Valicombe, they were told

A Child of Christmas

that he was ill in bed and could see no one. A few days afterward, Nan having failed to put in an appearance, word came to Shady Dale that she, too, was ill; and this news was immediately followed by the announcement that she had the smallpox! This was nothing less than terrible. There is nothing better calculated to create a panic in a country community than the appearance of smallpox, and it was well for Nan that her father was a physician.

But where did the disease come from? How did poor Nan take the infection? It was the wonder of a long day, until it was discovered that Peter Valicombe, who had been ill in his room for several days, had the same disease. You may well believe the people were properly indignant that such a malignant distemper should have been brought among them. It was bad enough that it should have been brought at all; but that it should have been brought by a foreigner was almost past endurance. There was some pretty hot talk by those who had small children; but Dr. Ran-

The Making of a Statesman

dolph Dorrington, who, if anybody, was the one to complain, took it all as a matter of course. He tried to quiet the fears of the foolish, and to cool the anger of the indignant. He it was who took prompt measures to isolate the two cases, securing for that purpose a vacant dwelling in the outskirts of town.

It was a tumbled-down old place, to all outward appearances, but the interior was all that it should be. The rooms were large and well ventilated, and in fact it was precisely such a building as Dr. Dorrington would have chosen, even if he had had the choice of a dozen. But after the patients had been removed, a feat which the Doctor accomplished unaided and alone, he was confronted by the most serious difficulty of all. Who was to nurse Nan? And if Nan found a nurse, who was to nurse poor Peter Valicombe? It was a very serious matter; and while he was sitting by Nan's bed, trying to solve the problem, he heard a light step in the hall, and the next mo-

A Child of Christmas

ment in walked little Miss Johns, as cool as a cucumber and as fresh as a daisy.

“ Oh, but this won't do!” cried Dorrington, as Zepherine started to Nan's bedside. “ You must get right out!” he commanded. His voice was stern, and indignation sat on his countenance.

“ But, if I won't,” she said with a smile, “ what then? ” She took off her hat and hung it on the bedpost, placed her bundle of clothes in a chair, and went and leaned over Nan, who was in a raging fever, and rather flighty in her mind. All this was done so quickly and so quietly that Dorrington had no opportunity to interfere unless he could have made up his mind promptly to use forcible means to eject the young woman from the room. She placed her hand on Nan's brow, and in a few moments the child ceased to mutter and throw her arms about.

“ Now, what you think?” said little Miss Johns, turning to him with a smile of triumph.

The Making of a Statesman

"Why, I think you are very silly," he replied, angrily.

She was sitting on the side of the bed, but she rose as suddenly as if he had slapped her, her face red as fire. "I think you——" She caught herself, and then her face became very pale. "I have shame for you," she said, all trace of indignation gone; "I have shame for anyone who does not want his sick child to have the attention of her friends. Well, then, if that is your feeling, I can nurse the other—Monsieur Valicombe. Where have you placed him?"

"He is in the room across the hall. But why do you come here? What business have you here? Have you thought of the risk?"

"You have no need to take off my head," she replied. "If I say what I think, it will make your ears burn. Go get me some—some—what you call this grease that is on the pig-skin when it has been in the smoke?"

Angry as he was, Dorrington was compelled to laugh at this description of bacon rind, and

A Child of Christmas

his smiles made Zepherine angrier than ever, for she was very sensitive about her ignorance of English. "I don't care if you get it or not!" she exclaimed.

But the Doctor made haste to do as he was bid, feeling that he was in no wise responsible in the matter. He had given the foolish girl fair warning. But had he? He paused on the threshold on his way out and reflected. Did the girl know it was smallpox? Did she know that smallpox was infectious—dangerously malignant? He returned to the room and put the questions as they occurred to him. The only answer he got was: "Oh, silly! Will you get the laughable pigskin?" He regarded her with amazement. Dr. Randolph Dorrington's friends and acquaintances were not in the habit of dealing with him in this cavalier manner. Usually, he stood very much on his dignity. He shuddered to think that Mr. Billy Sanders might hear of the little passage-at-arms and report it about town. But the truth of it never came to Mr. Sanders's ears. As for Zepherine,

The Making of a Statesman

she was far more on her dignity than he was when he saw her again.

When he returned with the bacon rind Nan was sound asleep, and little Miss Johns was in the room with Mr. Valicombe, and the two were rattling away in French at a terrible rate. Dr. Dorrington went in there, after looking at Nan, but neither one paid the slightest attention to him. He might have been in Halifax, so far as they were concerned. Finally, he asked Mr. Valicombe if he didn't think that he was talking too much for a man in his condition.

"If 'twas in English—yes," replied Peter; "but in French—oh, no. It will make me well. Oh, I am much better at once." And it seemed to be true. His eyes were brighter, and he seemed to be doing better every way; but Dorrington thought the eyes were a little too bright, the voice a little too strong, and he said so very curtly, as Zepherine thought.

It turned out that the Doctor was right. In a short time Mr. Valicombe showed symp-

A Child of Christmas

toms of a slight relapse, and from that time forth it required the most patient and painstaking nursing to keep the breath in his body. It was fortunate for both the victims of the infection that they had little Miss Johns to nurse them, and it was even more fortunate that this young woman had been taught how to nurse the sick by the good Sisters at the convent. Her art in this matter was a revelation to Dorrington, who had an idea that all the trained nurses of that period were to be found in the large hospitals, in some of which he had practised when he was studying his profession. It seemed to him that the vitality of the girl was abnormally developed. No matter how long she had been on her feet during the day, no matter how much sleep she had lost, a sigh from Nan would bring her to the child's bedside in a flash, and she was as prompt with poor Peter Valicombe.

It was a trying time when she had to tie Nan's hands to prevent her from scratching her face to pieces. But she was heartless in this

The Making of a Statesman

matter; no entreaty could move her. The father ceased to be a physician when Nan's pleadings reached their height. "You must untie her hands," he declared.

"Oh, must I?" she exclaimed with heat. "Then why not make me? I dare you!" she exclaimed, as he took a step forward to release the poor red hands. "Why not go about your business? You are doing nothing but harm here." Dr. Dorrington was not used to such treatment as this, and the fact that it was unprecedented in his experience since Matthew Clopton used to order him around, left him with nothing to fall back upon but his delicate consideration for the views and feelings of the fair sex. He paused, regarded the young woman curiously, and then turned away and sat down.

It is unnecessary to go into all the details of the treatment which Zepherine's patients received at her hands. For one thing, she flatly refused to carry out the Doctor's orders with respect to some matter which he deemed im-

A Child of Christmas

portant; she insisted on having her own way, and in almost every instance it turned out to be the better way. This was especially true of her treatment of poor Peter Valicombe. Dr. Dorrington had told her more than once that it would be almost impossible for Mr. Valicombe to recover. Zepherine, however, insisted that it was absolutely necessary that he should recover; she clung to the idea, and worked in the light of it, and finally her faith was rewarded. Mr. Valicombe became convalescent, and at the first fitting opportunity the Doctor had, when Zepherine was out of hearing, he told the patient that he owed his life to Miss Johns.

"All right, all right," said Mr. Valicombe; "she lose nothing by that. I will make her very glad of it."

It will be readily believed that Dr. Randolph Dorrington, though he was very popular, personally, with everybody in the county, made no social visits while he had charge of these victims of the infection. But when he did resume the regular practice of his profession, all

The Making of a Statesman

danger of the spread of the disease being over, he had to put up with a very severe lecture from the ready tongue of Mr. Billy Sanders.

"I declare, Randolph, I'm ashamed of you; be jigged ef I ain't! Why, supposin' that little forrin gal had 'a' took the smallpox an' 'a' died? Wouldn't that 'a' been a purty piece of business for you to stagger around under? Why, in the name of charity, didn't you ketch her by the ear an' lead her out of the room?"

"Well, I heartily wish you had been there to carry your plan out. I couldn't do a thing with her."

"Why, I could tote her on the pa'm of my han', Randolph; she ain't bigger'n a sparrer," persisted Mr. Sanders. "Whyn't you put her out by main strength?"

"Well, there are several reasons," responded Dorrington. "One is that she slipped in before I knew she was within a mile of the place; another is, that she had hold of Nan's hands before I had any idea what kind of a caper she was going to cut; but the real reason

A Child of Christmas

why I didn't insist on driving her away is, that I didn't want to have a fight with a woman."

"But, Randolph, that child is as shy as a flyin' squirel, an' lots gentler than old Kate, the nag you drive to your buggy," Mr. Sanders persisted, but there was a sparkle in his eye as he spoke. "Do you mean to tell me, Randolph," he went on, "that that child, not much bigger'n a hummin'-bird, an' mighty nigh as cute, reelly frailed you out up thar whar you couldn't holler for help?"

"No, I didn't say that," replied Dorrington, with a laugh; "but you will say it, and I'll never hear the last of it. Well, you may say what you please; she's a very brave little woman, and the best nurse I have ever seen. There is no doubt in my mind that she saved the lives of Nan and Valicombe."

"That bein' the case, Randolph, why don't you take her into your business as a partner?" inquired Mr. Sanders, dryly.

The physician laughed at the suggestion. "The fact is," said he, "I made her angry the

The Making of a Statesman

moment she came into the room, and she has never recovered her good-humor so far as I am concerned. I honestly believe she has a contempt for me, though she's wonderfully fond of Nan, as Nan is of her."

"Maybe it's bekaze you haven't apologized for your rowdyism when she fust made herself prominent as a self-nominated candidate for the office of nurse and gener'l super'ntendent of smallpox cases." Mr. Sanders would have his joke.

III

TO say that the little French shoemaker was grateful to Zepherine would fall far short of the truth. He took it for granted that she was an angel in the shape of a woman, sent specially to relieve him from pain and to drag him back to life, and he conducted himself accordingly. Not a Sunday afternoon passed that he did not stroll out to Shady Dale to see her. He was quite welcome there, too, for in spite of the fact that he was a shoemaker he had the refinement and good taste that seem to be inseparable from the average Frenchman; and there was a simplicity about him, a childlike gentleness, that was very pleasing to Sarah Clopton. He came and went so quietly that Mr. Sanders was moved to say that he went about as if he were a flake of thistledown.

It was during one of these visits that Miss Johns took occasion to tell Mr. Valicombe

The Making of a Statesman

why she had come so far from home. She told, also, of her father; how he had gone away from home, and how she, too, had come away to find him. Some day, she said, she would be able to go to New Orleans, where she knew her dear father was. At this, Mr. Valicombe shrugged his shoulders as Frenchmen will, and told her that New Orleans was a very large city; a city where there were many people of all tongues. Whereupon Zepherine shrugged her shoulders, too, and the gesture was very cunning, saying that, no matter how large the town might be, or how many people were there, the good God would enable her to find her dear father. To this Mr. Valicombe very readily assented. It might be so, certainly.

But as the cooler weather drew on there came a time when the visits of Mr. Valicombe ceased. This was very pleasing to Nan Dorrington, who was a little jealous of the Frenchman. Since her illness she was more devoted to Zepherine than ever. In fact, she was never

A Child of Christmas

happy away from her. And Nan was more beautiful than ever. There was not a mark on her face to show that she had ever suffered from that terrible disease, and it was all owing to Zepherine. This was what Nan's father said, and of course it must be so.

And yet, between Nan's father and Zepherine a terrible state of affairs existed. This was owing in part to the jovial Mr. Sanders, and in part to the misunderstanding that had arisen when Zepherine had made her unexpected appearance as a volunteer nurse. When Zepherine returned home Mr. Sanders was the first to greet her, and his greeting brought the blood to her face.

"Why, hello, honey!" he exclaimed; "I'm mighty glad to see you lookin' so well. They tell me," he declared, "that you frailed out the Doctor e'en about as soon as you got in the door of the pest-house. Well, I'm mighty glad to hear it; he's been needin' somethin' of that sort for a long time."

"Frail! What is frail?" inquired Zepher-

The Making of a Statesman

ine, albeit she had a dim conception of her own that it meant a dispute.

Mr. Sanders laughed. "I bet you that Randolph knows what it means," he replied; "an' you couldn't a-whaled a chap that deserved it more."

"Whale? Oh, I don't know what you mean."

Mr. Sanders was compelled to go off somewhere by himself to have his laugh out, as he expressed it, and Zepherine was forced to fall back on Sarah Clopton for an explanation. When the explanation was given it quite took Zepherine's breath away.

"Oh, I was very rude to him," she said, weeping a little and blushing a great deal. "But how could I do? He was also rude. He would drive me away when I go to take care of his own child."

"Why, my dear, he didn't want you to catch the disease," Sarah Clopton explained.

"But if I catch it, what is that to him?" cried Zepherine with some show of indignation. "If

A Child of Christmas

he have it, I won't take care of him—unless—” She paused and gave Sarah Clopton a swift glance.

“ Unless what? ”

“ Unless you or Nan want me to go there.”

The older woman regarded Zepherine with a curious smile, and she continued to smile after the girl had gone for her embroidery-frame.

Whatever the smile may have meant, it had no effect on Zepherine, for whenever Dorrington came to Shady Dale, which was often, the young woman promptly disappeared, and was seen no more until after his departure. More than once he made inquiries about her, and on one occasion he said he wanted to see her for the purpose of apologizing for his rudeness.

“ Why, I hope you haven't been rude to the child, Randolph,” remarked Sarah Clopton when he mentioned the matter. “ She thinks that she was rude to you.”

“ Well, only properly so. I was irritated when she came into that house, but not for long. I soon found that she knows more about

The Making of a Statesman

the treatment of smallpox than I do. But the way she treated me would have made Mr. Sanders smile. She threw my medicine out of the window, and refused positively to follow my directions; and yet Nan tells me she's the timidest, gentlest little thing in the world. I'm sure I don't understand her at all."

"No, Randolph, you don't; and it's better that you shouldn't. The surest defence we women have is the fact that no man can understand us. If it were otherwise, the world would be quite topsy-turvy in a very short while."

There was small satisfaction to be drawn from this remark, in spite of its wisdom, but Dorrington had to make the best of it. Later, when Sarah Clopton informed Zepherine that the Doctor had made inquiries for her, she raised her eyebrows in astonishment.

"For me?" she cried.

"Yes; he said he wanted to apologize," replied the older woman, dryly.

"Apologize to me!" exclaimed Zepherine.

A Child of Christmas

"Well, poor man! if he know nothing of smallpox, and know not who should apologize, he must have a deep trouble somewhere. I am quite sorrowful for him." Whereupon the young woman laughed scornfully, thereby exhibiting a new phase of her character, as a man would have thought. But Sarah Clopton, being a woman, renewed the dry smile with which she had regarded Zepherine on a former occasion. This time, however, Zepherine saw it, and seemed to divine its import. "Oh, now you are laughing at me!" she cried, blushing violently. "I am very foolish; I cannot tell why your Doctor Randolph cause me to be so out of temper all the time, day and night."

"Why, he's not nearly so important as that," replied Sarah Clopton; "he's nothing but a great, big, blundering, good-natured man."

Zepherine tossed her head and her eyes flashed. "Well, I wish I could see some of that great good-nature," she said, scornfully.

"Well, my dear, I'm thinking you'll have plenty of opportunities," the older woman sug-

The Making of a Statesman

gested. "After a while you'll come to the conclusion that Randolph is not important enough for you to jump up and run away every time you hear his footstep on the gravel outside. He's been coming here regularly many years, but I've never taken the trouble to try to distinguish his footstep from that of other people."

"Oh, but if you were in my place," said Zepherine, blushing; "if you had heard him walking as I did, all through the long night, while Nan was so ill—well, I think you would know his step when you heard it. I know yours, and I know Nan's. I don't think it is so hard to know the step of those you—oh, I mean those you like or dislike; do you think so?"

"No, I suppose not," replied Sarah Clopton; "but I have had so many things to think about, you know, that I haven't had time to study the sounds of my friends' footsteps."

"But there are some things you must think of, no matter what you may be doing," Zepherine insisted.

A Child of Christmas

"Certainly," Sarah Clopton replied; "but that is different."

Zepherine twisted her fingers together, a sure sign of perplexity, saying, "If I could think in English, you would know what I mean."

"Oh, I think I could guess," said the older woman, tapping Miss Johns on her glowing cheek. "Yonder is Nan; run and meet her. I think you need more exercise. You mustn't become a mope at your age."

Zepherine was only too glad of an excuse to get away from this friend, who had suddenly developed a desire to tease; and she made haste to meet Nan. Now, this rompish creature did not allow her good digestion and her buoyant health to interfere with her romantic tendencies. She found mysteries in the commonest events of life, and a good part of the time she dwelt in a world of her own creation, in which she could indulge in any kind of adventure, and where all her dreams could come true.

As soon as she saw Zepherine, she threw up

The Making of a Statesman

her hands with a shrill scream of delight. She had the most delicious mystery, and she just knew it would turn out to be a real and truly true romance. She had gone around to Mr. Valicombe's shop to find out why he didn't come to Shady Dale any more, and one of the men there—he had two now—had told her that Mr. Valicombe was not in town at all; that he had gone to New Orleans, and that he didn't propose to return until—at this point she placed both hands over her mouth and gave Zepherine a wild look.

“What, then, is the matter with you? Why do you begin to tell something, and then pause in that way?” inquired the thoroughly puzzled Miss Johns.

“Oh, I want to tell you, but I mustn't. Oh, Mr. Sanders would never forgive me. Indeed he wouldn't; he told me so. It is the most perfectly lovely idea I ever heard of; but you must promise never to ask me about it. If you don't, I shall have to go away somewhere, and stay.”

“But what can it be? Is it about me?”

A Child of Christmas

As she spoke, Miss Johns began to blush even as she blushed before Sarah Clopton.

Nan paid no attention to the blushes. She simply placed a hand over her mouth and shook her head. When she did speak, she pretended to be angry. "You know I am just dying to tell you, and you are asking me about it when I begged you not to. Oh, if you knew how wild I am you wouldn't dare to ask me!"

"Dare! It is something terrible, then," said Miss Johns, her face becoming pale. "Oh, if you care for me, please tell me."

Nan seized her in a furious embrace. "Oh, you sweet goose! Oh, you dearest! Don't drive me crazy. I could tell you but for Mr. Sanders. When he saw me coming from the shoemaker's he called me, and asked me how much I knew about Somebody, and I pretended to know a great deal, and I kept on hinting and asking him how much he knew. And, oh, it's the most wonderful thing!" Up went the hand to the mouth again, and nothing that Miss

The Making of a Statesman

Johns could say or do had the effect of inducing Nan to tell what she knew.

The fall drifted into winter without producing any change in the season. In the almanac, especially Grier's, December is put down as a winter month; but in middle Georgia, in 1860, it paraded itself as the sister of June; the roses bloomed, the birds sang, and the apple-trees, mistaking the portents, began to clothe themselves with blossoms. The sun shone with the warmth of spring, and the delicately crisp breezes were laden with the odors of the season of flowers. It was a respite to be thankful for. There were days of such perfection and beauty that the dullest man could not fail to perceive that he had something to be thankful for; it was an experience that would hardly occur twice in a generation.

Well, it was upon the balmy wings of this perfect season that the days drifted toward Christmas; and when that day was near, the word went around, as we say in Georgia, that Mr. Valicombe, the shoemaker, had returned

A Child of Christmas

to the village. He had not come upon the stage-coach, Nan was certain of that, for it was her daily privilege, in good weather or bad, to take particular note of the passengers, whether they were few or many. No, he had not been a passenger on the stage-coach. In Malvern he had hired a conveyance, and had timed his start from that city so as to arrive at Harmony Grove after nightfall; and the driver, who had his supper at the tavern, declared that Mr. Valicombe had brought a companion with him. This driver further said that the two passengers talked outlandish; they talked all the way, and he couldn't understand a word they said. He didn't know whether they were planning to knock him in the head and take the carriage and team, or what they were going to do. For his part, he didn't want to haul no more outlandish folks, not if he could help himself.

The day after his return Mr. Valicombe appeared to be in very high spirits. He saw Mr. Sanders on the street and called to him, and after the two had talked together for a few mo-

The Making of a Statesman

ments, they went to Mr. Valicombe's shop, and there they had another consultation, which lasted an hour or two. After that they went to the tavern, where Mr. Sanders made a very peculiar inquiry. He asked if anybody had seen Nan Dorrington. Well, of course, somebody had seen her, but nobody knew where she was at that particular moment; she might be at Shady Dale, or at Miss Puella Gillum's, or romping about in the woods, or she might be drilling her military company, a justly famous corps, composed of raggedy-taggedy little negroes. Home was the last place to look for Nan, but she happened to be there when the two men went by on their way to Shady Dale. They called for her, and then the three went on their way; which caused Mrs. Absalom Goodlett, Dorrington's housekeeper, to remark that there would certainly be war if old Billy Sanders, the Dutchman, and Nan were going around plotting against the whites. The peculiarity of this good woman was that she always abused her friends and spoke well of those

A Child of Christmas

she didn't like, so that it became a common saying in that neighborhood, when a person went wrong, that he was earning the praise of Mrs. Absalom.

This good woman, watching from her window, saw the three plotters stop in the middle of the road and stand there talking. Then, all of a sudden she saw Nan jump at the shoemaker and throw her arms around him. This done, the child seized Mr. Sanders by both hands, and tried to swing him around in a wild dance. Owing to circumstances, Mr. Sanders was not swingable. He simply turned on his heels and allowed Nan to whirl around him, and when she had finished this series of gyrations, she threw her arms around his rotund figure and gave him a good squeezing. Mrs. Absalom concluded that there must be a very serious plot on the part of the disaffected population; but she laughed softly to herself, for whatever pleased Nan, delighted Mrs. Ab., though she didn't like to see her colloquing with foreigners.

The Making of a Statesman

And certainly Nan seemed to be very well pleased this time, for when she and her companions reached Shady Dale, she rushed at Miss Johns and came near smothering her with hugs and kisses, and she repeated the same performance with Sarah Clopton; for the child, neither then nor at any period of her life, was ashamed of her emotions.

“Nan, Nan! you are smothering me!” cried Sarah Clopton, struggling and laughing. “What does it mean?”

“Oh, don’t you know?” exclaimed Nan; “it’s only two days to Christmas. Nonny”—her pet name for Mrs. Absalom—“was saying t’other day that if this spell of weather keeps up we’ll have ripe peaches on April Fool’s day and figs in May.”

This being a matter beyond dispute, Nan’s small audience could only laugh at her enthusiasm. However, when no one else was looking, Mr. Sanders winked and Mr. Valicombe shrugged his shoulders after the manner of his people. And then—how it was done no one

A Child of Christmas

seemed to know—Nan inveigled Miss Johns into taking a walk; whereupon Mr. Sanders, reinforced and supported by Mr. Valicombe's eloquent shoulders and hands, gave Sarah Clopton to understand that it was the desire of certain influential individuals to set out a Christmas-tree for the especial pleasure of Miss Johns.

"Are you deserting Nan?" the lady asked.

"By no manner of means," replied Mr. Sanders. "'Nan is to be the ring-master, an' me an' Peter will be the trick clowns, as you may say. Anyhow, Sarah, you're likely to l'arn something from this tree. The fruit it'll b'ar will surprise you might'ly. It's a new variety. I seed one in Injianny when I was wi' my Hart kinnery. You know, Sarah, we ain't used to 'em down here; we jest hang up our stockin's in the chimbley jam, an' trust to luck for to find somethin' in 'em the next mornin'. I've seed the time when old Sandy Claus gi' me the go-by, but he can't walk around the tree we're gwine to plant here."

"Well, what kind of present will you give

The Making of a Statesman

the child?" Sarah Clopton inquired. "I have a number of things to give her, and I've been trying to think of some way to surprise her pleasantly. I confess I like the old way the best. I'm a great believer in Santa Claus, old as I am, and I once took it for granted that all girls are alike in that respect. But it is not so. Zepherine tells me that among her people, Christmas is a religious celebration, and the giving of presents is reserved for New Year's, when the young people come from far and near to kneel before their parents and ask their blessing."

"Yes, yes! that is so," said Mr. Valicombe. "It is the old, the very old habitude."

"Well, it's mighty different here," remarked Mr. Sanders. "In this State an' section, even the half-grown children give their parients a blessin' out any day in the year; an' they are so superior to them that raised 'em that they seem to git along mighty well wi'out a blessin' of any kind. But that's a gray hoss of another color. This is a case whar we can't hang up stockin's,

A Child of Christmas

an' even bags is barred. One of the presents we'll have the honor to give the young lady has got so many sharp eends and cornders that it can't be shoved into anything less'n a hogshead. Havin' no hogshead, we'll have to stand it up by the tree; an' so, ef thar's no objection from the attorney for the plaintiff, we'll agree on the tree, and call in the next witness. I know right whar thar's a mighty bushy bush that'll jest meet our views."

And so the matter was arranged. That afternoon the tree, a lusty young holly, with a rank growth of foliage, was brought in from the woods and concealed in the carriage-house. The next day there were various mysterious consultations going on. Miss Johns was with Nan, and if she observed anything out of the ordinary, she gave no sign. But the day before Christmas she could hardly fail to note that something extraordinary was on foot. Nan was not visible, and when Miss Johns would play on the piano she found the parlor door locked, and, pausing a moment, she heard muf-

The Making of a Statesman

fled and mysterious sounds within. For a second—oh, it was the briefest moment—a sharp pang of loneliness (or was it jealousy?) seized and took possession of her; and then, in a flash, she remembered her pleasant surroundings, and all that had been done to make her happy. There were other things she remembered, too—things that brought a heightened color to her face, and caused her sensitive lips to quiver. She told herself that though she ought to be happy, she was not happy at all. She wanted to go away, but durst not. Oh, there were times when a wild and frightened heart was fluttering in that innocent bosom—especially when Randolph Dorrington's step was heard on the gravelled walk.

She turned away from the parlor door. If there was nothing else she could do, she could finish a piece of lace she was making; so she took her work and sat out of doors in the pleasant sunshine. Nan, who had been set to watch all of Zepherine's movements, gave a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness!" she cried. "Now

A Child of Christmas

I can go into the parlor without climbing in at the window.”

With Miss Johns out of sight and hearing, the work of arranging for the Christmas-tree went on rapidly — the house-servants being called in to assist—and it was soon over with. Then the bustle ceased, and the house once more became a serene haven of rest and repose. The parlor-door was locked and Mr. Sanders had the key.

IV

CHRISTMAS morning dawned bright and beautiful. There was not a cloud in the sky or a hint of frost in the air. The mocking-birds were singing in the orchard, and the blue-jays were vigorously chiding a gray squirrel in one of the big oaks. An early breakfast was the rule at Shady Dale, and Christmas morning was no exception. The negroes were crowding around the back door, ready to cry out, "Christmas gift!" to all who came in sight. Then Sarah Clopton made her appearance, and the negroes were soon in possession of the presents intended for them; and not one was forgotten, from the oldest to the youngest.

Following this came the justly famous Christmas-tree, which Mr. Sanders regarded as his own particular property. He it was who threw open the door of the parlor, remarking

A Child of Christmas

that he was not only tyler of the lodge, but special bailiff as well. The room presented a very beautiful appearance. The heavy red curtains had been drawn together to exclude the light of day. The illumination came from the six big candlesticks that had done duty in the Clopton family for many generations. The Christmas-tree, also, bore a burden of small candles attached to its boughs, and was furthermore loaded with packages of various shapes and sizes. It made a very brave show, indeed. It was placed at one end of the large room, being flanked on either side by curtains which completely concealed the corners.

From behind one of these curtains came Peter Valicombe, who said that everything was ready. Then turning to Miss Johns, he said in French: "Mademoiselle, will you please play for us one of the songs you heard when a child, one that your good father taught you?"

Zepherine hesitated, her hands clasped together. "But why?" she asked; and then, without waiting for an answer, she went to the

The Making of a Statesman

piano, drew a deep breath, and began a lilting melody that her father had composed for his violin. It was very beautiful, but few among those who were listening heard it to the end. The curtains behind the Christmas-tree slowly parted, and a stranger made his appearance. He moved toward the piano, smiling. His hair was white as snow, but his face was that of a man in the prime of life. His features were at once fine and strong, and his eyes were brilliant.

“ Oh, how beautiful! ” exclaimed the impulsive Nan. Zepherine thought she was enraptured by the melody, but Nan was no longer listening to the piano.

For some reason or other which he never could explain to himself, Randolph Dorrington stepped forward and took the stranger by the hand and led him nearer the piano. And right here Nature stepped in and destroyed the dramatic scene which poor Peter Valicombe had arranged for. As Flavian Dion listened to his own music, played by the daughter who had

A Child of Christmas

been all in all to him, he broke down; the tears began to roll down his face. He fumbled awkwardly for his handkerchief, saying: "I beg you' pardon; that ees my li'l' girl; that ees my li'l' child. I have seen her, oh, not for many a long time."

When Zepherine turned around, the first thing she saw was Randolph Dorrington holding the hand of——

Her thoughts flew no farther. "Oh, what is this?" she cried. But there was no need to tell her; she knew; she had been expecting something like this. She ran into her father's arms and held him tightly, while he stroked her hair and fondled her face, calling her by all the pet names that were dear to her childhood's memory.

"I reckon," said Mr. Sanders, wiping his eyes with his big red "hankcher," "I reckon we'd just as well postpone the case, an' leave the witness wi' her." He went out, and all the rest followed his example, Sarah Clopton going last and closing the door behind her. At the

The Making of a Statesman

end of half an hour Mr. Sanders knocked on the door, stating in a loud voice, and with the intonation of a sheriff's bailiff, that court must now be opened and all unfinished business concluded. The door was opened by Zepherine, whose happiness had somewhat subdued her. An hour before she was a girl, but now she was a woman, with responsibility tugging at her sleeve. Not one of her friends but could see the change. She could hardly bear to leave her father, and she sat holding his hand and stroking it, and frequently looking up in his face.

Mr. Sanders went to the tree, saying: "Ef the jury is ready, we'd jest as well go on with this case." He took a package from the tree. "For Miss Nan Dorrington; a thrip's wuth of candy from an old lover. An' here's a letter marked Zepherine. It's badly spelt, an' they don't seem to be much in it."

"I want nothing but this," said Zepherine.

"Nothin' but the letter? Well, here it is,

A Child of Christmas

honey." Mr. Sanders found it impossible to restrain his humor.

"I mean I want nothing but my father," replied Zepherine.

"Well, he's a good big chunk of a present," said Mr. Sanders; and then he went on distributing the presents until he came to the last, which was such a large bundle that it had to be placed at the foot of the tree. "For William H. Sanders: one pa'r of second-hand trousers, fresh from the dry-goods emporium of Jake Einstein." He unrolled it, and, sure enough, there was an old pair of trousers, much the worse for wear.

In the midst of the laughter that followed Sarah Clopton suddenly asked where Randolph Dorrington had gone. "Well," replied Mr. Sanders, "he seed that nobody was sick enough for to take a blue pill, or a doste of jollup an' calomel, an' so he lit out."

"He's outside," said Zepherine. "I hear him walking."

Sarah Clopton observed that the young

The Making of a Statesman

woman had opened all her presents save one—the first she had received. But when Peter Valicombe came and sat by her father she excused herself. She ran to her room and tore the envelope open. It contained a brief note from Randolph Dorrington. He said he had long sought for an opportunity to apologize for his rudeness on the occasion of Nan's illness, and would she kindly permit him to speak with her a few moments. She placed the note in her trunk, and then stood wringing her hands, uncertain what to do. She looked at herself in the mirror, and made a mouth at the reflection she saw there. Then she went out upon the veranda, and saw Dorrington sitting on one of the low double seats scattered about the lawn. She hesitated, but finally gulped down her shyness, or fear, or whatever the feeling was, and ran down the steps, and went toward him. Dorrington rose to meet her, hat in hand, and wanted her to be seated, but she shook her head, and immediately opened the attack.

“ When you make fun of me as you do, you

A Child of Christmas

are too cruel," she declared indignantly. "You are too cruel when you speak to me of apology. You do that because you know how hurt I am because of the way I spoke to you when Nan was ill. Yes, I think it is cruel." Tears were in her eyes and her lips quivered.

"But, Zepherine," he said, a little sadly, "I remember nothing but my own rough speech and manner. If you were rude you had a right to be. But isn't there some excuse for me? Will you forgive me?"

"It is I who should say that," Zepherine declared, but Dorrington noticed that she was very particular to leave it unsaid.

"You haven't answered my question," he insisted.

"Because it has no need of answer," she replied.

"Well, I will ask you another that you will be compelled to answer," he said.

"Oh, compelled!" She smiled at him, but there was trouble in the smile. "I will be compelled. Well, that is different."

The Making of a Statesman

"Will you marry me?" he asked.

"Will I——" All the color left her face.

"Will you be my wife?"

"Why, you must be in great trouble if you come to me. Have you no others to go to?"

She had suddenly recovered her composure, and was now, to use one of Mr. Sanders's comparisons, as cool as a cucumber.

"I want no other," he answered.

"Do you think I would come between you and Nan? She would break my heart by hating me."

"Then let us leave the matter to Nan," he suggested.

"Why, I never heard of such a thing," protested Zepherine. "You must be——"

"I certainly am," he answered. At that moment Nan came out of the house, and when she saw Zepherine and her father, she went running to them. "Nan, I have just asked this young lady to leave her home here and live with us."

Nan gave a shrill scream of delight. "Oh, won't that be fun?"

A Child of Christmas

"But you don't understand," said Zepherine.

"Oh, don't I? Why, goosey, you must think I'm a baby—and I will be one when you come; you'll be my itsy-bitsy mamma."

"Oh, for shame!" cried Zepherine, getting very red in the face. Whereupon, Nan seized her dear friend and squeezed her as only Nan could squeeze. "You'll break every bone in my body," protested Zepherine.

"I'm very careful about that," Nan explained; "I'm leaving a few for popsy to crack!" With that she released Miss Johns and ran away.

"Miss Mischief! I'll get you for that!" Zepherine jumped up and ran after the bold thing. Nan permitted herself to be caught after an exciting little chase, but the punishment meted out to her was nothing worse than a kiss. The two stood talking a moment or two, and then they walked slowly back to where they had left Dorrington.

"You haven't answered my question," he said.

The Making of a Statesman

"Say it, goosey, and be done with it," insisted Nan.

Zepherine hid her face on the child's shoulder. "Oh, Nan, I love you; you know it well. I will do anything to please you."

"Popsy, there's your answer," said Nan, and then she ran away to the house, a very thoughtful and considerate performance.

"Oh, I thought all the time that I hated you," said Zepherine, after they had talked a while, "but when I saw you holding my dear father's hand, I knew the feeling was something else." She paused a moment, and then exclaimed, "What a Christmas this is for me!"

"And for me," said Dorrington.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

ONE Saturday in the early seventies, a young negro, hardly more than a boy, who had gone to the village of Harmony Grove on some errand, aimless or otherwise, suddenly discovered that his presence was both opportune and important. He had come from what was known as the Briscoe settlement, which lay nine or ten miles north of Harmony Grove on the road to Malvern. Arriving in the village, he unhitched his horse from the ramshackle old buggy, tying the animal to the wheel so that the steed might nibble comfortably on a couple of bundles of fodder that lay loose in the rear of the seat. This done, he made his way to the small wooden building which Harmony Grove dignified by the name of depot, and which was at once the passenger-station and the storehouse for such freight as

The Making of a Statesman

came to and went forth from that part of middle Georgia.

The negro had arrived during the forenoon, and the train was not due until two in the afternoon. Nevertheless he made no long delay in taking up his position on the sunny side of the platform around the miniature depot. In him, patience was next-door neighbor to sleep, and he was soon engaged in nodding; often he was on the point of falling from the platform, but always caught himself in the nick of time. In this way he made the long hours short.

The negro boy was effectually aroused finally by the rattle of the old hack which plied between the station and the tavern, and he straightened himself up. The hack passed so close to him, as he sat with his feet dangling from the platform, that the wheel-spokes struck against his toes.

"Humph! you must be tryin' to drag me down," he said to the driver, an older negro. "What you tryin' to drag me down fer?" The tones of his voice were soft and drawling.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

"Wanter see ef you 'live," replied the driver, curtly. His voice was in harsh contrast to that of the other.

"Well, when you foun' dat out," said the negro who had been nodding, "what den?" His tone was one of idle curiosity.

"Nothin' 'tall," answered the driver; "you ain't done nothin' ter me."

"Oh, I ain't? I thought maybe I hurt yo' feelin's some time when I wuz 'sleep." He laughed a flute-like laugh, as he continued: "I ain't done nothin'—well, dat won't be de tale you'll tell nex' time you try ter drag me down."

"I'm a blue-gum nigger," remarked the hack-driver, with a frown.

"Oh, you is?" laughed the other. "Well, dey useter be one down yan whar we-all live at. He ain't dar now. You go down dar an' ax um how come he ain't dar. Dey'll tell you ter-reckly."

"Boy, whar you fum?"

"Man, I'm from de Briscoe settlement."

The Making of a Statesman

“What yo’ name?”

“Flingin’ Jim.”

“Well, suh!” exclaimed the driver. He turned around in his seat and stared at the negro from the Briscoe settlement with great interest. The fame of the latter had evidently gone before him.

“How come you kin fling rocks like folks say you kin?” the driver asked.

“Kaze, when I wuz little a fox-squirrel sassied me an’ made me mad. I promised ’im I’d git ’im, an’ I got ’im.”

“Well, suh!” repeated the driver. Then, “How ’bout de blue-gum nigger?”

“Who—him? Well, he don’t b’long ’roun’ dar nohow. An’ sho ’nuff, he ain’t dar now!”

The whistle of the locomotive was heard a mile away, and presently its funnel-shaped smoke-stack appeared around a curve, and the whole train, consisting of a number of freight-cars, a baggage-car, and a passenger-coach soon drew up at the station.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Flingin' Jim kept his seat on the platform, and the driver remained in his place in the hack, although the train and such bustle as its arrival created were on the farther side of the building. In a little while the baggage-master, a florid young fellow, came around and threw a consumptive-looking mail-sack at the hack-driver's feet.

"Any passengers?" inquired the negro.

"I hunted around in the car and found one a piece down the road. He may have walked and beat us in," said the baggage-master.

Nevertheless the passenger had been patient enough to remain on the slow-going train, and he now appeared.

"Is there a livery-stable here?" he inquired. Receiving an affirmative reply, he asked if it was possible to get a "conveyance" to the Briscoe settlement.

Flingin' Jim sat up straight at this, and looked hard at the stranger from under the brim of his wool hat.

"Yassar, you kin git took out," replied the

The Making of a Statesman

driver, "but all de bes' stock done hired out. De town young men went huntin' dis mornin', some in buggies, an' some on hossback. But dar's a boy I speck kin take you out. I dunner what kinder rig he got."

"She ain't right bran'-new," said Flingin' Jim, with a grin, "an' she may wabble some, but she'll lan' you dar, suh."

"Very well, I'll go with you."

The gentleman—he was a stranger to both negroes—was tall and dark. His face was far from handsome, but his features were strong. His eyebrows were very heavy. When he lifted them, as he did when asking a question, his face was sombre. When they fell back over his keen black eyes, his countenance seemed to be both fierce and arrogant. And yet, in spite of this aspect, in spite of the heavy mustache and imperial, there were lines of both tenderness and humor about his mouth. He appeared to be about thirty. The hack-driver had turned his team and was on his way back to the hotel when he saw Flingin' Jim wres-

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

ting with a huge valise. He came to a halt, and called out:

"Fetch dat kyarpet-sack here an' put 'er in de hack; I'll take it uptown."

"You sho doin' me right dis time," said Flingin' Jim, gratefully. "Dey wouldn't be no trunks an' no chists ef ev'body had dis kinder doin's."

The stranger paid no attention to all this, but stood on the platform gazing curiously at an old two-story building that sat in a clump of pines on a hill to the right. The building had once been the village academy. He was aroused by the hack-driver, who inquired if he would ride to the village, the centre of which was half a mile away.

No, he would walk. He took his time about it, too, sauntering along and pausing to take in some scene or prospect that seemed to strike his fancy.

Flingin' Jim was ready and waiting when the stranger arrived on the public square. The old buggy was hardly presentable. The

The Making of a Statesman

paint and varnish had all worn off, and what had been the dashboard was now simply a frame of rusty iron; but the vehicle was still strong, having been made in the days when good, honest workmanship was in fashion.

No fault could be found with the horse, which was a creature of some spirit, trotting steadily and swiftly when the road was level, and taking the shorter hills with a bound and a rush.

As they went along, the gentleman fell into conversation with the negro, and soon learned that some member of his family had been in the habit of coming to town every Saturday for several years; sometimes his mammy would come, but for a long time his daddy had been coming. Now, however, the responsibility had been laid on his shoulders.

"It's mammy's doin's," explained Flingin' Jim. "She got it strong in 'er min' dat Marse Phil Moseley gwine ter come back some time."

"But why on a Saturday?"

"Ef I ax myse'f dat question one time, I ax

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

it leb'n hunder'd an' leb'nty-leb'n times," replied Flingin' Jim. "Mammy may know why, but she ain't tol' me."

"What is your mammy's name?"

"Elviry Moseley, suh. We-all useter b'-long ter de Moseleys, suh. My daddy name Bob Moseley. Marse Phil useter call 'im Unk Bobuel. Daddy 'low he speck mammy's sen'-in' in atter Marse Phil."

"Phil who?" inquired the gentleman.

"Marse Phil Moseley. Daddy say he wish Marse Phil'd make 'as'e an' come on ef he comin', kaze it's terrifyin' ter hafter stop a plough-hand eve'y Sat'day in de year, 'specially when de grass is in de craps."

"Well, I should think so!" exclaimed the gentleman. "What does your mammy want with this Phil Moseley?"

"Des want 'im ter come back. Big house dar empty an' gwine ter rack, an' Mr. Bill Dukes say de county gwine ter step in presently an' sell de whole place fer taxation er sump'n like dat."

The Making of a Statesman

“What has become of the rest of the Moseleys? Was Philip the last of his family?”

“Oh, dey wuz mo’ un um, suh; but some went off an’ some done dead—Miss Sue, she married, an’ I bet you she’s a-makin’ dat man toe de mark right now, dis very minit. Miss Sue wuz cousin ter Marse Phil’s ma’s cousin.”

The gentleman laughed for the first time, an event so unexpected that Flingin’ Jim looked at him sidewise, and asked him if he knew Miss Sue.

“I’ve heard of her,” was the reply. “I used to know Phil Moseley, and he told me about her.”

“Is Marse Phil dead?” asked the boy.

“Yes; he’s dead, but he’s not buried.”

Flingin’ Jim thought this matter over for some little time. “Well, suh!” he exclaimed. “Dead an’ ain’t buried!” The statement rhymed, in his mind, with some old-folk tale he had heard his elders tell. “No wonder dey say de house ha’nted. I speck it’s Marse Phil comin’ back kaze he wanter be buried.”

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

"You are certainly correct about that," said the traveller, with grave emphasis.

The sun was still shining when Flingin' Jim and his passenger passed by the little church which seemed to interpose its presence between the settlement and the evil influences that might be presumed to emanate from the village miles away. Established as it was upon a hill, the church was properly termed Mount Horeb, and this name had belonged to it ever since the third year after Matthew Clopton had settled at Shady Dale. If the building is standing to-day, it is one-hundred and ten years old.

A few hundred yards farther on, they passed by a field in which an old negro woman was digging, while a boy was kneeling near by gathering up the result of her labors.

"Dat's granny," Flingin' Jim explained; "granny an' my Brer Sam. I speck dey er gittin' a mess er taters fer Sunday. Well, suh!" he exclaimed, "ef granny ain't got de long-handle weedin'-hoe you kin shoot me!"

"Well, why not?"

The Making of a Statesman

“Kaze she allers say dat when anybody see ‘er diggin’ wid de long-handle weedin’-hoe sump’n ‘bout ter happen. She been had dat hoe und’ her house ever sence Marse Phil went ‘way.”

“She must have felt that a stranger was coming,” remarked Jim’s passenger.

“Granny sho is a plum sight,” said Flingin’ Jim, with pride. “Is dey any special place whar you wanten be took, suh?”

“What about this haunted Moseley house?” the stranger inquired. “If there is any bed or furniture left, I should like to stay there. Couldn’t your mammy manage to get me up something to eat?”

“She mighty handy wid de pots an’ pans, suh,” the negro replied.

They drove to the old house which loomed up dark and grim even with the last rays of the setting sun shining upon its tall roof. Flingin’ Jim left his passenger sitting in the buggy and ran to his mammy’s house, which was not far away. Elviry heard what Jim had to say.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

“ ‘Tain’t Marse Phil,” she remarked, with a sigh. “ Ef it had ‘a’ been Marse Phil, he wouldn’t ‘a’ waited fer you ter come atter me. An’ mo’ ‘an dat, he’d ‘a’ axed you ‘bout—but n’er min’; I’ll go an’ look at ‘im.”

The gentleman made known his desires in a very few words. He had come to look after the Moseley property, and settle up all the affairs of the estate. If there was a bed left in the house, he would like to sleep there, and if Elviry could cook him something to eat while he remained in the neighborhood, he would pay her well.

The woman hesitated one brief moment, with a question on her lips. Then she went around the house and soon had the front door open. The stranger had taken his heavy valise from the buggy with one hand and carried it to the veranda as easily as if it weighed not more than a pound and a half—a fact that caused Flingin’ Jim to utter an exclamation of surprise.

By the time the gentleman entered the door,
[165]

The Making of a Statesman

more than one candle was lit. Placing his valise in the hall, he called to Jim, "How much do I owe you?"

"Mammy'll tell you dat, suh," responded the negro, and at once drove the buggy away.

However grim and dark the exterior features of the old house appeared to be, the interior presented a most homelike appearance. On every side there were evidences of neat housekeeping. On the hearth a fire was kindled. A clock in the dining-room chimed the half-hour, answered by the clear bell of the clock on the sitting-room mantel. It was half-past six.

"You must have been expecting someone," the stranger suggested.

"Not specially, suh," replied Elviry. "We des tryin' ter please Marse Phil. He liable to drap in any minit, an' I know mighty well he'd like ter have eve'thing look like it did de day he went off. A white lady comes an' fixes up fer me when I have ter clean up. You see dat book on de table dar? Well, Marse Phil

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

wuz lookin' at it de mornin' he lef', an' when he turn 'roun' to say good-by to we-all, he laid it right whar you see it layin' now."

"Is that so?" said the stranger.

"'Twon't be no trouble fer ter git yo' supper," continued Elviry. "We allers has eve'y-thing ready ag'in' de hour when Marse Phil is ter come."

"But suppose he doesn't come?"

"He des bleege ter come; dey ain't no two ways 'bout dat." Having thus settled the matter, she piloted the gentleman to the back porch, where there was fresh water to drink, and to remove the dust of travel.

Supper was soon ready, and it was a good one, to which the new-comer did ample justice. Elviry had placed two candles on the table, and had so arranged them that they would illuminate the gentleman's face. Beyond praising Elviry's cooking, he said nothing; but when he had dulled the edge of his appetite, he suddenly looked up. Seeing Elviry regarding him intently, he smiled.

The Making of a Statesman

"Bless God!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands together.

"What is the trouble?" he asked.

"Why, I come mighty nigh fergittin' de jam!" Elviry replied, in a tone so queer that the gentleman looked at her again; this time with amazement.

The jam was promptly forthcoming. When he had finished, the gentleman declared that it was the best supper he had eaten in many years. He paused on his way to the sitting-room, saying:

"How much do I owe you for the buggy ride?"

"Who? Me? How much you owe fer bein' brung out here? A ten-dollar bill in greenbacks—dat's how much!"

"Well, I'll be——!" exclaimed the gentleman.

Elviry went out into the hallway. "Come in de settin'-room," she said. "Set down in dat cheer dar." The stranger complying, Elviry seated herself on the floor near the corner of the hearth.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

She picked up a splinter that had fallen from the kindling, and looked at it, twisting it around and about her fingers. "Marse Phil," she said, still studying the sliver of pine, "I been knowin' de Moseleys ever sence I been born, an' been hear talk er dem what I ain't knowed, an' dis de fust time, in so fur ez I knows, dat arrer one un um wuz ever cotch sneakin' back home."

The man's face reddened and his jaw fell, but Elviry saw nothing of that; she was studying the pine splinter.

"Plague on you!" Moseley exclaimed; "how did you know me?" There was irritation in his tone, but no anger.

"I knowed you by the skyar on you' lip, whar you cut it wid a chany cup when you wuz l'arnin' ter walk."

"Why, there's no scar there," he replied, taking a candle and examining his lip in a mirror.

"You draw you mouf open like you gwine ter laugh, an' you'll see it show red." At this

: *The Making of a Statesman*

he laughed in earnest, and sure enough the scar showed, a tiny stroke of red. He replaced the candle on the table and seated himself again. During all this time Elviry never raised her face to look at Moseley; and he, looking at her intently, suddenly remembered this was always her way. She was fifteen when she became his nurse, and he was a month old. Until he was nine, she nursed him or followed him about, and he remembered with something like a pang that during all these years the only rebuke she ever administered was to display shame or grief when he transgressed the rules of right conduct.

“I suppose you are ashamed again,” he suggested, somewhat curtly.

“Yassar, I is; mo’ ’shame’ now dan all de yuther times put terge’er.” She paused, but he made no reply, and she went on: “Marse Phil, how come you ter do it; what make you do it? Is dey anybody atter you? Wuz you feared we-all wuz cheatin’ you?”

The truth is, he hardly knew the motives

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

that had prompted him to refrain from making himself known, especially to Elviry. He had reasons—not very good ones, perhaps; still they were reasons. As he used to do when a child, he proceeded to put Elviry on the defensive.

“Why didn’t you go around telling everybody that you were sending after me every Saturday?”

For the first time since she had been in the room, she raised her head and looked at him through her tears. “Do which, Marse Phil?”

“Why didn’t you send word around the neighborhood that you were sending to town for me every Saturday? You didn’t even tell Uncle Bobuel, did you?”

For answer, Elviry threw back her head and laughed joyously. “Dat des de way you use ter do when you wuz little. Now you nee’nter b’lieve I dunner why I ain’t tell Bob, kaze I does; but I can’t put it right plain in words.” Even while she laughed, she was wiping away the tears.

The Making of a Statesman

"That's about the way I feel," said Philip Moseley. "There's no reason why I shouldn't have had handbills scattered around announcing that on a certain day Phil Moseley would return to his old home, but I didn't."

"But you ain't tell me 'bout it atter you done come. You never said howdy, an' you never shuck han's."

"Well, I'll not bother you long, and I'll shake han's when I start back home."

"*Home! Home!*" exclaimed Elviry, with vehemence. "Ain't dis yo' home? Ain't dis whar ole miss an' ole marster live an' die at?" In her earnestness Elviry rose to her feet and stood facing Philip Moseley.

"Well, I've lived in Mississippi so long that it feels more like home than this place." He had followed the fortunes of Bedford Forrest during the war, and had gone with that great fighter to Mississippi when Providence called a truce.

"Seven year ain't so long," she replied.

He made no reply, and she suddenly asked, "Is you married, Marse Phil?"

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

"No, by George! and I never expect to be."

Elviry fumbled at the red table-cloth with her fingers. "Well, dey useter be a young lady some'rs in dis county dat you set some sto' by."

"Yes," he replied, stroking his mustache. "I've forgotten her name. The only thing I remember about her is that she gave me the back of her hand and the toe of her shoe, as the saying is."

"Well!" cried Elviry. It is impossible to describe on paper the tone and emphasis employed by the negro woman to charge this simple exclamation with doubt, distrust, and contempt.

He looked up at her, and something he saw in her face, some expression of pity not unmixed with disgust, caused his eyes to fall and the blood to rush to his face. It was almost as if he were a boy again.

"Well—what?" he said, with some irritation.

The Making of a Statesman

"Nothin' 'tall, suh," Elviry replied.

Her voice was low and humble. She turned slowly away and went about cleaning off the table in the dining-room.

Something or other in the situation gave Philip Moseley considerable discomfort. As he sat there gazing in the fire, the face of a girl he used to know slowly shaped itself in his memory—the face of Ann Briscoe. It was a very striking face, sensitive, proud, reserved, and yet marked by a tenderness that flashed from lustrous brown eyes—a face that was noble rather than beautiful. Specifications such as these had not occurred to Moseley's mind during the days when he was to be found at Ann Briscoe's elbow, or riding by her side at all proper hours. But now, he could check off each feature of that haunting face, and glibly give the name of each quality or group of qualities that it stood for. He knew now why neither he nor anyone else had ever called her "Annie," though the fact used to puzzle him.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

He had been grandly and dramatically in love with Ann Briscoe in his early youth, and for some years afterward. The two had, in fact, exchanged pledges when he started off for the war. He wrote her as soon as an opportunity offered, and that was the last of his youthful dream. He wrote again, to be sure, and the third time, but no reply ever came, and he gave himself over to some very miserable hours during the long days and nights that followed. In fact, he knew now why he had come sneaking back, as Elviry had said, and he knew only too well why he had refrained from making inquiries about this girl he used to know. Girl? If still unmarried, she must now be an old maid of twenty-six.

Elviry had had her own hopes. But these had been shattered and her plans crumbled before her eyes. She said to herself that the Marse Phil she had been expecting for so long was not the Marse Phil she had formerly known, and she felt that his return was but a matter of money.

The Making of a Statesman

Philip Moseley could hear her muttering to herself as she cleared the table or as she crossed the hall. Her words failed to reach him, but what she was saying was that he needn't be afraid that anybody had cheated him out of a thrip. The truth is, the affairs of the plantation had been well managed. The court of ordinary had appointed 'Squire Barksdale administrator until such time as Philip Moseley should return or until proof of his death was forthcoming.

Judge Barksdale was glad to lease the plantation to Ann Briscoe, who, in managing her own property after the war, had developed a considerable capacity for business. She had, too, the advice of her father, who, though a helpless invalid, had a clear head and a vigorous mind.

There was just enough enthusiasm left in Elviry to urge her to bring about a quick settlement of the whole business. The next morning, after she had prepared breakfast for Philip Moseley, she returned to her own house.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

The day was Sunday, but she stirred up things at a lively rate. She had an errand for her husband, who was sunning himself on the door-sill.

“ Bob, you git up fum dar, an’ take yo’ foot in yo’ han’ an’ go tell Miss Ann fer ter sen’ dem ’count-books what she been keepin’. Take dat bag dar an’ fetch um in it. Ef she ain’t dar, you come back an’ tell me; I know right whar dey is. Now, man, move like you got some life in you!” She followed him to the opening of the rugged fence that answered the purpose of a gate. “ Min’, now, ef she ain’t dar, you come right back.”

Uncle Bobuel knew from Elviry’s tone that something more than ordinarily serious was on foot, and he made no delay. He covered the half-mile to and fro in a very short time, bringing back with him a number of account-books, mainly copy-books, such as children use at school; but among these were two or three “ day-books ” which had been made to serve the purpose of ledgers. They

The Making of a Statesman

were all neatly arranged and carefully tied together.

Now, if Ann Briscoe had been at home, this bundle of account-books would never have been given to Uncle Bobuel. The contents of all of them had been summed up and set forth in one of the larger books. But Miss Ann had gone from home immediately after an early breakfast; she had heard that one of her friends was ill, so she determined to call on her way to church. Her father was at home, however, and when Uncle Bobuel made his desires known, Mr. Briscoe wheeled his chair into the library, pointed out the books, and bade the negro get them down from the shelf.

"Take 'em along, take 'em along," he said, with some petulance. "I don't see why Barksdale can't come here and look at 'em."

"'Tain't Marse Barksdale, suh," remarked Uncle Bobuel. "I 'lowed fum de way Elviry done, dat it mought be Marse Phil Moseley hisse'f."

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

"Well, he's got nothing in the world to do with these accounts," exclaimed Mr. Briscoe, with some heat. "But take 'em along, take 'em along. Your Miss Ann has nothing to hide."

Now, as a matter of fact, Ann did have something very important to hide; something of which her father knew nothing. Nevertheless, Uncle Bobuel took the bundle and went trudging home with it. Once there, he handed it over to Elviry, who took it from the bag and placed it on her head. Nicely balancing it, she took a pitcher in one hand and a basket in the other, and made her way to the big house. Strange to say, the house seemed to be lonelier than ever. The door was open, but the blinds in front were tightly closed. She carried the package of books into the sitting-room and placed it on the table.

"Here de sums an' figgers. Ef dey er wrong anywhar, dey kin be sot right. 'Twon't take Miss Ann two minits an' a half ter fix um." Elviry had almost as much respect for

The Making of a Statesman

Miss Ann's "sums and figgers" as she had for Miss Ann herself.

"Why, I asked for no accounts," said Moseley. "I wouldn't know head from tail if I were to go through them a dozen times. Who has kept these accounts? Miss Ann Briscoe; very well. If Miss Ann Briscoe says they are all right, that settles it with me."

"Well, dar dey is," Elviry insisted, "an' dar I'll leave um. You may change yo' min' 'bout lookin' at um, an' den you'll fin' um handy. Mo' dan dat, I ain't got no place ter put um at, less'n I sen' um back ter Briscoe's."

She waited for some response to this, but Moseley was watching a belated white butterfly fluttering about the flower-garden, where a few fall blossoms were in bloom. Observing his abstraction, and resenting it as indifference, Elviry turned and hurried from the room to see about dinner. But Moseley called her back.

"Elviry, what in the name of heaven has

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Ann Briscoe to do with this place?" His manner was very solemn.

"You better ax what she ain't got ter do with it," replied Elviry. "Why, Marse Phil, ef it hadn't been fer me an' Miss Ann de whole place would 'a' gone ter rack an' ruin. All yo' blood kin done dead, an' de lawyers des a-wait-in' a chance fer ter hatch up a showin' dat you done dead too. Dat what I hear Marse Barksdale say, an' Miss Ann 'gree wid 'im."

As Moseley said no more, Elviry went about her business, still in a pucker. Moseley untied the package of account-books and began to examine them with indifferent interest. He remembered Ann Briscoe's handwriting well. There was a certain boldness and deftness in its style, bordering on masculinity, and these qualities were thoroughly characteristic. He remembered how completely she differed from all the women he had ever met in her open sincerity, and her complete indifference to those trivial and unimportant conventions that are made so much of by the great majority of the

The Making of a Statesman

weaker sex. She was thoroughly a woman, but possessed both common-sense and humor.

Philip Moseley remembered all these characteristics with satisfaction rather than indifference, as he thumbed one book after another. Presently, in the very centre of the bundle, he came upon a paper-bound volume a trifle smaller than the rest. It was the young woman's diary, and he felt that he had no right to open its pages. And yet—he had opened them. At the moment the thought occurred to him, his thought lay against a date line—"July 31st, 1861." The entry that followed was in these words: "P. M. has now been gone three months to a day. He was to write and he has not written. Mr. Dukes, who was in P. M.'s company, has returned on a furlough. He says that all are well. To me this is very strange news—that all should be well. Mr. Dukes said that the soldier boys in his company 'loaded him down' with letters and messages. A letter from P. M. to me would have been the last feather to break the camel's

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

back. Mr. Dukes has been kind enough to remind me that he asked me to marry him before he went away, and I have been cold enough to ask him if he remembers what my answer was." Another entry was made under date of January 4, 1862: "Still no word from P. M. It is really curious that one's *friends* should be dead and still lack burial."

Moseley closed the book with a laugh, remembering the remark he had made to Flingin' Jim. Yet in his inmost soul his emotions were tragical enough to suit the occasion. He tied the books together again, and went out into the garden, where he paced up and down the familiar walks, thinking. His memory had become absurdly strong and vivid. He remembered that as he was writing his first letter to Ann Briscoe, some of the boys started a rabbit—their camp was newly pitched in the neighborhood of hedges and thickets of briars. The yells of the troops had so frightened the rabbit that it ran blindly into his tent and took refuge between his feet as he sat writing.

The Making of a Statesman

He could remember, also, some of the tenderer passages of the letter. He had written in a great glow of feeling, for it was a period of his life when hope, and courage, and the passionate devotion of youth ran high. He remembered that his first letter had been intrusted to a man named Grierson—a friend and kinsman of this William Dukes whose name Moseley had found celebrated in Ann Briscoe's diary. Grierson had been transferred, at his own request, to the Department of the Gulf, and on his way there, intended to stop at Harmony Grove to transact some business for Mr. Dukes.

Dukes—well, something about the name must have been funny, for Moseley smiled as he spoke it aloud. Then he lit a cigar, the fumes of which, floating houseward to Elviry, caused that appreciative individual to pause in her labors long enough to remark, "Hit sho do smell like ol' times." Then there was the "P. M." of the diary. Did the letters stand for *post meridian* or *post mortem*? Again

[184]

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Moseley smiled, and Flingin' Jim, passing by at the time, took it to himself and bowed, lifting his hat.

"Good-morning, James," said Moseley.

"I'm mighty well, suh. I seed granny tot-in' de big basket des now."

"Now, is that so?" inquired Moseley, gravely. "And on Sunday, too?"

"Yes, suh, granny been sayin' fer de longest, dat when she dig wid de long-handle hoe, an' tote a big basket down ter de spring an' back, hit's gwineter be de sign er sump'n. Specially when she tote de hoe an' de basket. I ax her what she got in dar, an' she say, 'Larroze ter ketch meddlers.'"

"Well, well!" exclaimed Moseley, with a solemn affectation of wonder.

"Dat's granny's sesso, suh, it sho is; larroze ter ketch meddlers. She say dat when she do like dat, hit's gwineter be a sign ter we-all in de fambly, dat Marse Phil done come back."

"You don't tell me! And has he returned?"

The Making of a Statesman

"I speck he is, suh," replied Flingin' Jim, directing a shrewd but fleeting glance at Moseley. "Ef he ain't here now, he'll come ter-day."

"By the bye, do you know a man named Grierson?" Moseley inquired. He had no thought but to change the subject.

"Huh!" grunted Flingin' Jim, "eve'ybody know dat man. He come here right atter de war, an' settle down close ter Mr. Bill Dukes. Dey say Bill Dukes gi' 'im de lan'. But he ain't been here long 'fo' he had a fallin' out wid Bill Dukes an' his Brer Tom, an' dey cotch 'im out one night an' come mighty nigh beatin' 'im ter death. He been cripple ever sence. Dem Dukes is monstrous servigrous folks—dey sho is."

"H-m-m! Sq I've been told."

"Dey tol' you right dat time. After dis Grierson man got his beatin', he took an' move off. You know whar de Trimble useter live? Well, right dar you'll fin' Grierson—des beyan' de Tunison place. He married Miss Jane

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Fraley. Miss Jane wuz a right promisin' white 'oman when she married Grierson, but now—" Flingin' Jim paused and shook his head. " Marse Barksdale say dat eve'y year count fer ten wid Miss Jane sence she married dat man. Folks say dat man put a spell on her." Evidently Flingin' Jim was fond of gossip.

" Is there a horse on the place that's fit to ride?" Moseley asked.

Flingin' Jim laughed. " We got one dat's fitten, but I don't speck you kin ride 'im. Miss Ann rides 'im sometimes, but it's all she kin do."

" Well, saddle him directly after dinner. I want to pay a party call."

" Daddy'll saddle 'im, suh—not me."

Whereupon Moseley went to the barn to inspect the horse, and, if possible, make friends with him. The creature was very peculiarly marked. He was a chestnut sorrel, but his head, a part of his neck, and the near hind-leg were as white as milk, the skin underneath giv-

The Making of a Statesman

ing it the pinkish reflection which frequently marks the albino type. Sherman's army, in passing through that section, took all the stock on the Briscoe plantation, but left in its place a thoroughbred mare which was in no condition to travel farther. The peculiarly marked horse was her offspring.

Moseley soon discovered that the bad character which Flingin' Jim had given to the horse was due partly to a lack of understanding, and partly to the desire of Uncle Bobuel, who had the care of him, to win a reputation for himself as the manager of an unmanageable horse. The astonishment of Flingin' Jim was great when the strange gentleman, who had never seen the dangerous animal before, walked confidently into the stall, untied the halter, and led the well-groomed horse out into the sunlight. Beyond a few antics which never carried him to the length of his halter-strap, the creature did nothing but stand with his head high, and draw into his pink nostrils huge volumes of the sweet atmosphere which is the

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

boon that Indian summer brings to those who know her and watch for her coming.

"Miss Ann named 'im Prince, suh, an' dat what we-all calls 'im," said Flingin' Jim, by way of comment.

Prince was too fat for hard service, but otherwise he had been carefully groomed. His coat shone like satin in the sun, and his peculiar markings gave him an uncanny appearance. Nevertheless, Prince was very beautiful.

"Daddy say he savin' Prince fer Marse Phil," Flingin' Jim went on. "He say Marse Phil kin ride any hoss what'll stay on de groun'. Dey all say dat. But Daddy, he 'low dat when Marse Phil come, he'll ride dat hoss wid a halter."

Everything, it seemed, was waiting for Philip Moseley, and everything was for his special glorification.

After dinner, Moseley called to Flingin' Jim to show him where the bridles and saddles were, and the horse was soon ready for the

The Making of a Statesman

journey to Mr. Grierson's. At one part of the proceedings, the negro boy shook his head. The horse had always been ridden with a curb, but Moseley substituted a snaffle. By the time he had settled himself in the saddle, he seemed to be a part of the horse; and somehow the appearance of both was greatly improved. The first burst of eagerness over, the horse settled down into a long, swinging stride that was the perfection of ease and grace; and for the first time in many a long day Moseley found himself enjoying some of the sensations peculiar to the years of his youth.

Mr. Grierson was at home. Alas! he was always at home these days, so Mrs. Grierson said, as she met Philip Moseley at the door. Prepared by Flingin' Jim's description, the visitor had no difficulty in recognizing the lady whom he had known before her marriage as Miss Jane Fraley; but there was no point of resemblance between the buxom Jenny and this shrunk and weazened woman, old before her time.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Shrunken as she was, Moseley soon discovered that what she had lost in flesh she had gained in spirit and temper, and he quickly found that the gossip which placed her in the attitude of an abused wife, had not a particle of basis in fact.

"Wishin' may be believin'," said Mrs. Grierson, "but it's strong in my mind that you're no other than Phil Moseley."

"You are right, madam," was the reply, "and I'm very glad to see you again."

"Well, you've come in the nick of time, and I thank the Lord for that much," exclaimed Mrs. Grierson.

"Janey! Janey!" cried a wheezy voice from within; "don't talk so loud. Bill Dukes'll git wind of your wild words an' he'll be down upon us."

"Listen at him—just listen! I could die when I hear him say that! Oh, if I was a man!" Mrs. Grierson's voice was so stifled by passion that she spoke in a hoarse whisper. And then, in impotent rage, she beat her clenched hand against the door-facing.

The Making of a Statesman

She recovered herself almost immediately, saying, "Don't take me for a fool till you see me in the lunatic asylum."

He followed her into an inner room, where, lying upon a rude stretcher, he saw Mr. Grierson, the shadow of a wreck, and yet clinging to life most strenuously. The stretcher on which he lay had wheels at one end and handles at the other, so that it could be rolled from room to room.

"Look at that," said Mrs. Grierson, grimly, pointing at the wreck; "look at it and tell me what you think of it."

It was out of the question that Moseley should enter into the woman's mood.

"Mr. Grierson probably doesn't remember me," he remarked.

"Well, I reckon I do," cried the cripple, petulantly, "when I've laid awake all night many a night waitin' for you."

"I'm truly sorry to see you in such a plight," remarked Moseley.

"Plight—plight? What's plight got to do

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

wi' it? I tell you it's the mind that works trouble; the body hain't got a thing to do wi' it. It's the mind—the mind, constant a-wanderin' and a-tossin'. Roll me in t'other room, Janey, where there's a better light."

This was promptly done, and Moseley was pressed to have a seat in the rocking-chair.

"I have no long time to stay," the visitor remarked. "Mr. Grierson, several years ago I intrusted you with a letter. You were going to Harmony Grove, and it was to be posted there. Have you any idea what became of that letter?"

Mr. Grierson rolled his eyes toward his wife, who was sitting beside the stretcher, and the response came from her.

"He knows; he knows mighty well. He took the letter, brought it to the Grove, and handed it over to Tom Dukes, just as Bill Dukes told him to do."

"I'll tell you why I done it," said Mr. Grierson. "I done it because Bill Dukes told me to do it. He and his folks had favored me in

The Making of a Statesman

many ways. He said he was engaged to be married to Miss Ann, and that she didn't want to be pestered wi' letters, so I fetched it here and handed it over to Tom Dukes."

"And you see what's come of it all," remarked Mrs. Grierson, solemnly, with a gesture toward the wreck on the stretcher.

"Did it never occur to you to say something about it to Miss Ann?" inquired Moseley.

"It certainly did," responded Mrs. Grierson, with emphasis, "but I didn't know her so mighty well, and I went about it the wrong way, I reckon. Anyhow, she cut me up. That was—oh, ever so long ago. But one day durin' last summer, I met Ann Briscoe in the road, and she asked me plump and plain what I meant when I spoke to her about a letter. Well, she had cut me up, and I paid her back then and there. Says I, 'When I wanted to tell you, you wouldn't listen, and now I'll not tell you.'"

"And that ain't all," said Mr. Grierson, rais-

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

ing his peevish voice. "Every letter that ever passed betwixt you fell into the hands of Tom or Bill Dukes. Why, I've hearn 'em laugh about the way they worked it. Well, Bill and Tom Dukes they done it. I says to Bill Dukes, 'You didn't git the gal after all, and I'm blasted well glad of it.' One word fetched on another and both of 'em lit on me, and I ain't never walked a step from that day to this."

"You know what I believe, Phil Moseley?" suddenly remarked Mrs. Grierson. "I believe Providence has worked for you from the first jump."

"I'm afraid not," replied Moseley, shaking his head. And yet he had often noted some very curious coincidences in his career. Nevertheless——

"Nevertheless," said he, giving voice to his thought, "the two men who have done me the foulest wrong are alive and prospering."

"They're alive and prospering to-day," commented Mrs. Grierson, "but the Almighty don't go by human clocks. Don't the Good

The Making of a Statesman

Book say some'r's that a thousand years ain't more'n a minute wi' Him?"

"That is true," said Moseley, rising to take his departure. He promised to come again, after assuring and reassuring Mr. Grierson that he bore no ill-will. "You were but a blind tool in the hands of these men," he explained to the old man. "Both of them will have to answer to me for their rascality."

"Well, thank the Lord for that much!" exclaimed Mrs. Grierson. "You'll find that when they have to toe the mark, they won't be so full of fight as they are when they jump on a man when his back's turned."

Philip Moseley bade the couple good-by, and was soon skimming along the red road, enjoying to the utmost the swift undulations of the spirited animal he was riding. He sat perfectly erect in the saddle, his bridle-hand low, and his right arm hanging easily by his side. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. He saluted or raised his hat to every person he met on the road, or passed going in

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

the same direction. There were a number of vehicles going his way, and in one of them sat Judge Barksdale, who was a justice of the peace, a man of affairs, and one of the most popular citizens of the county. It was Judge Barksdale, who, exercising his neighborly impulses, took occasion to point out to the court of ordinary the necessity of appointing an administrator for the Moseley estate.

“Now, that is what I call riding,” exclaimed the Judge, as Philip Moseley sped past. “If the horse was to turn a somersault and light on his feet, you’d see that chap right where he is. Why, I believe that’s the Moseley horse.” Molly, his daughter, was sure of it. “Well, well! I hope it’s Phil,” said the old man.

Now, when Ann Briscoe reached home from church that afternoon, it chanced that her father was asleep. When he awoke, the incident of the morning had passed from his mind, and it was not until he was ready to retire for the night that he remembered it.

The Making of a Statesman

"You've heard the news, I reckon," he remarked to Ann.

"No, I've heard none."

"Well, they say Phil Moseley has come back." He did not look at Ann.

"Who brought the news?" she inquired.

"Why, old Bob. After you went to church, I heard a mighty shuffling and scrambling on the front porch, and there was old Bob in such a hurry and flurry that he scarcely had time to wait for what he came after."

"And what did he want, pray?"

"He said Elviry sent him for the account-books; and when I asked him what in the world she wanted with 'em, he replied that he thought Phil Moseley had come back. I told old Bob flat and plain that Moseley had no more to do with the accounts than a man in the next county."

"That is quite true," said Ann, trying to assume the attitude which would enable her to crush Moseley, should he dare to speak to her for any reason or purpose whatever.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

"But I considered the matter," her father went on, "and rather than give Moseley the idea that we have anything to hide, I told old Bob to take the books and mosey along with 'em."

The next morning bright and early, Ann Briscoe was up attending to the various duties and responsibilities which she had gradually taken upon herself. She felt unduly elated, as she supposed, and she tried, with some determination, to put the feeling aside. She had long ago reduced the romantic illusions of her youth to a consistency of fibre (as it were) which the fluttering moths of sentiment could not successfully assail. Nevertheless, it was a period full of very pleasant memories, and after breakfast Ann decided to reread a part of her diary. Her notes covered only a year and a half, but during that time she had been quite faithful in jotting down the sentiments and emotions with which her mind was charged.

She reached her desk, ransacked the shelves of the library, and then, flinging up her hands,

The Making of a Statesman

fell upon a sofa as if she had been shot. She had suddenly remembered that the diary had been placed among the books containing the accounts of the Moseley plantation. Her swift imagination could perceive Philip Moseley reading and laughing over the innocent confessions therein set forth. Her most intimate emotions, as she supposed, had been faithfully interpreted and written out, and the thought of it caused her to write in agony. But the young woman's collapse was of no long duration.

Suspended from the ceiling of the back porch, there hung a steel triangle, and alongside it a piece of steel about ten inches long with which to strike it. This was known on the Briscoe place as Miss Ann's gong. It was as loud as a country church-bell, and was used to summon field-hands to dinner, or to call such of the servants as were not in sight. One blow upon this gong meant a particular servant, two blows another, and three blows were a call for the man who attended to the mules and horses.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

Ann Briscoe hurried from the library to this gong, and struck three blows with such vehemence that the man (he was grooming Miss Ann's saddle-horse) dropped everything and ran to the house as rapidly as if he had been called to quench a fire.

"Saddle my horse," commanded the lady, as soon as the servant came within hearing distance.

Ann made no great preparations. She hastily adjusted a riding-skirt, put on her garden-hat, a wide-brimmed affair with a touch of blue in its make-up, and began to pace impatiently up and down. In a few minutes the negro came running, leading the horse at a swinging trot. By the time he reached the horse-block, Ann Briscoe was there also, and the next moment she was riding toward the Moseley place, almost as rapidly as the horse could go. The sweeping rush of the wind did her good, and the movements of the horse had a soothing effect upon her nerves.

She was soon in a position to see that even if

The Making of a Statesman

Philip Moseley had read and gloated over the confessions of her youth, no cataclysm had occurred. The Moseley house was still standing, as grim and as lonely as ever. No, not altogether lonely, for, though the blinds were tightly closed, there was Elviry wearing Uncle Bobuel's hat, and sweeping the front walk.

Elviry saw Miss Ann coming, and knew that trouble was brewing somewhere. Being a very excitable negro, she dropped the broom and ran to the gate.

"What de matter, Miss Ann? Name er goodness, what de matter?" cried Elviry.

"Hush!" responded the lady. "Don't talk so loud. How dare you send after those books when I was away? You've ruined me!" Her voice was charged with both indignation and grief.

"Why, Miss Ann, I thought de books wuz all right. I——"

"Didn't I tell you not to talk so loud?"

"Dey ain't nobody in de house. Marse Phil done gone off some'rs. He ain't never

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

totch de books. Dey er layin' right whar I put um at."

"Go and bring them here." Miss Ann breathed easier. She soon had the precious diary in her hand. "I'll burn you," she cried, exultantly, shaking it before her face. "I'll burn you the minute I get home." Without another word, she went galloping away.

Elviry stood looking after the young woman until a bend in the road hid her from view. "Well, well, well!" said the negro woman, talking softly to herself. "Ef a angel fum heaven had come down here an' tol' me dat Ann Briscoe had sump'n she wanter hide, er had sump'n wrong in dem 'count-books, I wouldn't 'a' b'lieved it—dat I wouldn't." She carried the books back in the house and tied them in bundle form again. "If anybody ax me what's de 'casion er all de ruination in de worl' I'll tell um it's money an' niggers. I'll say it anywhar!"

Just beyond the bend in the road which had hid Ann Briscoe from Elviry's eyes, there was

The Making of a Statesman

a hill which commanded a view of pretty much all of the settlement. The houses that could not be seen were small and insignificant indeed. This hill with the primitive forest on one side and cultivated or fallow land on the other, fell away to a valley in which there was a number of comfortable houses. Here lived Mr. William Dukes and his brother Tom, and not far away, Judge Barksdale had his home.

When Ann Briscoe reached the top of this hill, she saw three men. Two were walking together, and the third was moving toward them. As the figure of this third man was unfamiliar to her, Ann judged that it must be Philip Moseley, though he was too far away for his features to be clearly visible. On the right, in a piece of fallow land, a most unusual movement caught Ann's eye and arrested her attention. It was the stooping figure of a negro, running toward such cover as a clump of sassafras saplings would afford.

Ann Briscoe recognized the stooping figure as Flingin' Jim. Some instinct told her that

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

trouble was brewing. And this was indeed the case, for when the three men met in the road, there was a moment's pause, and then Philip Moseley proceeded to express his opinion of Messrs. William and Thomas Dukes in language that was more emphatic than refined. In short, Moseley employed terms which in the South (and, indeed, wherever men are amenable to insult) always mean a personal encounter.

Moseley had armed himself with a stout hickory, for he knew what to expect. But Mr. William Dukes was armed with a pistol, and this he attempted to draw, but Moseley was quicker, delivering a blow with his bludgeon which sent the man reeling. Meanwhile, Mr. Thomas Dukes made a rush at Moseley and the two clinched, engaging in a struggle which required all of Moseley's attention. In a moment Mr. William Dukes had recovered himself sufficiently to get his pistol out. He advanced close to the struggling men.

The Making of a Statesman

With a cry of warning on her lips, Ann Briscoe spurred her horse forward. What she hoped or intended to do she never knew. Whatever it was, she was too late for its performance, for as her horse plunged forward, she saw Flingin' Jim rush from behind the clump of bushes, whirl his body around and straighten his left arm quickly. Apparently responsive to these movements, Mr. William Dukes threw his arms out wildly, his pistol went off in the air, and he sank upon the ground.

By this time, Moseley had detached himself from his antagonist, and by a few well-directed blows soon had him crying for quarter, so that when Ann Briscoe reached the scene, peace reigned direfully. Perceiving which, the young woman made no pause, except that occasioned by her horse, which shied when it came to the body of Mr. William Dukes. Ann was strong enough, but the sight of blood, together with the strain under which she had labored, was too much for her. Her face,

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

which was white, grew whiter still when she looked at Moseley.

"Ann!" he cried; but she shook her head and rode on, and, when she reached home, went straight to her room and wept because she had not stopped and turned when his voice called her name.

Flingin' Jim, meantime, after he had gone through the singular performance which Ann Briscoe had witnessed, went running to Judge Barksdale's and informed that gentleman that a big fight was going on "down de big road 'twix' Marse Phil an' de Dukeeses." Judge Barksdale, piloted by Flingin' Jim, hurried to the seat of war; but when he arrived, the trouble was over.

"Hello, Tom!" Judge Barksdale exclaimed, "you've got life in you. I'm afeared your brother Bill's a-goner. Well, I've made two predictions in this settlement, and they've both panned out. One is that a man with a good hickory is equal to two armed men at close quarters; t'other is that Bill an' Tom

The Making of a Statesman

Dukes would some day wake up the wrong passenger."

"You say that Bill Dukes is dead?" inquired Philip Moseley, with some concern.

"It strikes me that way," replied Mr. Barksdale, in a judicial tone.

"Why, I never hit the man but once, and he was on his feet some time after that. I heard his pistol go off, and seeing him fall in a heap, I thought he had accidentally shot himself."

"No, sir; there's a soft place on the side of his head here, jest about the size of a walnut. He must 'a' butted ag'in' the eend of your hickory. Jim, run over to Doc' Dawson's and tell him to come here as hard as ever he can; and do you come back by Dukes's and tell some of the hands to hitch up some sort of a contrapment and come after the dead and wounded—if so be Bill is dead."

It was one of the peculiarities of Judge Barksdale that he was never flustered. Under all circumstances he was cool and self-contained.

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

"You fellers must have some good reason for this fracas," he remarked to Moseley; and when the latter told him briefly of the causes that led up to it, he took a pinch of snuff and nodded. "I endorse it as a human bein', but not as an officer of the law. And that's the reason you left your prop'ty hangin' in the air, is it? Well, it's a better reason than I thought you had, but it won't hold water. Young people in love are fools, and they never come to their senses till long after they are married. If you could ketch and spread out in a book all the unspoken thoughts that fly up the chimney-flue while married folks are settin' before the fire, you'd have a mighty interestin' volume."

"Is Bill dead?" asked Tom Dukes, who had been helped to a sitting posture by his late antagonist.

"It's more'n likely," replied Judge Barksdale; "but the Doctor'll tell us. I see him a-comin' now."

"William's not dead," the physician re-
[209]

The Making of a Statesman

marked, after a careful examination. "But he may die. What was he hit with?"

Philip Moseley explained the affair.

The Doctor was a very inquisitive man. "Did anybody see the fight?" he asked. There was no answer to the question. "This wound on William is of the same kind and character as the one I found on that nigger tramp—you remember him, Judge Barksdale—that ran after Miss Ann Briscoe. The nigger never knew what hit him; he was dead before he quit running." That being the case, Mr. Barksdale could give a reasonable explanation of the mystery, but he remained silent. He happened to see an iron ball lying in a wagon-rut near the side of the road. It was, in fact, a grape-shot, one of the relics of the war that had found its way to that section. He changed his position so as to place his foot near the missile, dropped his knife, stooped to recover it, and transferred both knife and grape-shot to his pocket.

Mr. Tom Dukes was badly bruised, but not

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

seriously hurt, and was even able to help lift his brother into the light wagon that soon came. He surprised Philip Moseley by inviting him to go with the others to the Dukes's place.

"I ain't got a thing ag'in' ye in the world, Phil—not a thing. I've got some papers there that I want to give you wi' my own hands. Bill wanted me to burn 'em, an' I told 'im I had, but they're all there."

Those papers were the letters written by Moseley and Ann Briscoe to each other. There were six of them—three written by each—and they had never been opened. Those he had written to the young lady, Moseley bundled up and sent to her by Flingin' Jim, with this brief note:

"DEAR MISS ANN: I send you three letters that you should have received long ago. What changes have taken place in your mind I have no means of knowing; but if the sending of them to you at this late day (they have just been recovered) is an act of impertinence, pray return them by the bearer."

The Making of a Statesman

After reading the note, Miss Ann questioned Flingin' Jim very closely, but in an indirect way, and thus discovered that the letters had been returned by Mr. Dukes.

"And how is Mr. William Dukes?" she inquired.

"He gittin' on mighty well, dey say."

Then he added: "I wuz too fur off. Dat clump er bushes whar I wuz at is mighty nigh two hundred yards fum de road—I done stepped it off. An' now dat man'll git up fum his bed, an' he'll piroot 'roun' an' shoot Marse Phil in de back. Is dey any answer?" he asked.

"No; no answer." Miss Ann blushed as she spoke. She reread the note in her own room. "He must think," she said, with a smile of scorn, "that women are as changeable as men."

She read these letters with mingled emotions. They were the intimate confessions of a young man floundering about in the arms of love and romance, and their ardor brought

Flingin' Jim and His Fool-Killer

to her cheeks a glow which took possession of that fair field and remained there. The last of the three created the deepest impression on her mind. It was the one in which he bade farewell to the dreams of love. It was melancholy but manly.

After going over the letters twice, Ann leaned her head on her hand, apparently in deep thought, and the burden of her reflections found voice. "I'd give a pretty to know what I wrote in *my* last letter. I'm sure it's something mean."

Not many hours elapsed before Philip Moseley came knocking at the Briscoe door, and Ann herself answered the summons. The man looked at the woman and held out his arms, and the woman ran to the sheltering embrace with a sigh of happiness and content.

Some weeks later, Flingin' Jim found his mammy picking a turkey. "Who dat turkey fer?" he asked.

"What you ax me dat fer, boy? You know

The Making of a Statesman

Marse Phil ain't gwine ter let nobody but me cook de dinner fer de infair."

"Dat so; dey gwine ter marry ter-night. Well, suh! I like ter fergit it. I been huntin' fer my fool-killer, an' marryin' ain't been in my min'."

"Marse Barksdale come by an' lef' a ball fer you des now. He call it a grave-shot. It's in dar on de bed."

"It may be a grave-shot," replied Flingin' Jim, "but I calls it my fool-killer."

"Ef it fetch you ter de gallows I'll never tell folks dat 'twan't rightly named."

Flingin' Jim laughed, saying, "Yander go Marse Phil an' Miss Ann. Dey er sho mighty chummy."

"Dey got de right ter be," replied Elviry.

Miss Puss's Parasol

Miss Puss's Parasol

ONE of the forerunners of Christmas and the holidays leading into the New Year, and a very welcome one, too, is Aunt Minervy Ann. Sometimes she comes as early as October, and occasionally as late as the last of November. Then, after lingering for a day or two, she goes back to Halcyondale. She comes in through the front door, goes through the hallway to the back porch, and hangs her hat or bonnet on a nail near the refrigerator. Then, after looking in the kitchen to see if the cook is a new one, she comes back into the house. Praising the neatness of everything, she gets a broom and a dust-pan, and proceeds to find dirt and dust and cobwebs where no one else would ever look for them. Sometimes this pleases the lady of the house and sometimes it doesn't; but praise or blame is all one to Aunt Minervy Ann when she's in the

The Making of a Statesman

house of her friends. Once when the lady of the house asked her somewhat sharply why she didn't come and take charge of the establishment, her reply was that if she lived in Atlanta she'd be compelled to have money.

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady, somewhat indignantly. "And don't you suppose we are willing to pay you good wages?"

"I ain't s'posin' nothin' 'tall 'bout it, ma'am. What I know is dat I wouldn't take no wages fum you-all. I ain't never tuck none fum Marse Tumlin Perdue. De las' time I 'fused ter take um, he laugh an' say dat he b'lieve I wuz totin' off mo' dan my wages wuz wuff anyhow. When I look at 'im right hard fer ter see what he mean by dat kinder talk, he look back at me des as hard, an' say, 'I tell you de fact trufe, Minervy Ann, ef I wuz ter pay you de wages you done 'arned, I'd hatter sell my house an' lot, an' den you wouldn't be half paid,' but Marse Tumlin is allers a-proj-ickin'."

The probability is, however, that Major
[218]

Miss Puss's Parasol

Perdue meant every word he said. He belongs to and was brought up with an emotional generation — a generation which was not ashamed of its feelings, and which made no sort of effort to hide its loves, its hates, and the sentiments that are natural to a high-strung race. Aunt Minervy Ann was brought up in this atmosphere, and her nature responds like an echo to whatever is emotional.

This year, Aunt Minervy Ann's preparatory visit was made in the middle of October, the excuse for it being the State Fair, which was in progress about that time, though she admitted that she hadn't been inside the grounds and didn't expect to go, being afraid, as she said, of the "farrer dealers an' de men what do trick-work wid de playin'-kyards." She had come in as usual, made a tour of inspection, and then returned to the sitting-room. "Dey tells me," she remarked, "dat you-all been havin' great gwines-on up here."

"What do you mean?" she was asked.

"Well, I hear Miss Vallie readin' in de paper

The Making of a Statesman

'bout you bein' on de jury down dar at de jail; an' I see wid my own eyes dat you got a new cook. Ef all dat ain't nuff fer ter fret de Mistiss here, I dunner what is."

"Well," was the reply, "the jury I was on didn't have to go to jail—and the cook seems to be doing pretty well."

Aunt Minervy Ann laughed. "Well, suh, I hear de new-fangled niggers say dat when dey go in de court-house, it's all de same ez gwine ter jail, kaze sho ez dey git in one dey'll lan' in de yuther. It's des a way dey got, an' dey can't no mo' he'p it dan dey kin he'p totin' off what ain't der'n. An' ez fer dat cook, you'll hear fum 'er; you sho will. She ailin' right now; she got de swell-foot, and some fine day, when you got company, she'll sen' you word dat her feet hurt 'er so bad she can't come. Now, you mark my words; I done seed dat sort befo'."

"What did I tell you?" said the lady of the house, turning to me.

"You can't fool de Mistiss!" exclaimed

Miss Puss's Parasol

Aunt Minervy Ann, with a laugh. "I hear talk dat de Mistiss gwine ter have some er her Northron kinnery wid 'er fer de holidays. Well, dey won't pester me, kaze Hamp done sell one bale er cotton fer mo' money dan he got fer three bales a while ago, an' I kin pick up an' come most any time—ef not Chris'mus, den some yuther time. Marse Tumlin say de reason cotton wuth so much mo' is bekaze dey so many new cotton fact'ries been put up. Ef dat de case, I dunner why de white folks don't go right ahead an' put up ten a day. Ef dey make cotton wuth mo' it look like ter me dat dey'd have one at eve'y cross-road."

When Aunt Minervy Ann was invited to visit us on Christmas as usual, she became somewhat serious. "I know'd I'd git a invite ef I fished wid a long nuff line an' a strong nuff hook," she remarked. "I speck you-all will git ter b'lievin' dat I des come 'roun' fer sump'n ter eat; but when it come ter fishin' fer vittles, I let you know dat dey ain't many places whar I goes ter fish at; dat dey ain't! De folks

The Making of a Statesman

down dar at home will all tell you dat. Ef I wuz stayin' here all de year I'd go ter Marse Tumlin's fer Chris'mus, but bein's I'm dar all de year, it does me good ter come here. Yes'm, I'll come; I'll come de day befo', an' ef I don't 'arn my dinner de Mistiss nee'nter gib me none."

Aunt Minervy Ann then went on to tell us all the neighborhood news—that peculiarly interesting gossip, which never by any chance gets into the newspapers, and which is all the more interesting on that account. Finally, having exhausted her budget, she threw her head back and asked me if I remembered Miss Puss Gresham. Not caring to wait on my uncertain memory, Aunt Minervy Ann went on: "She wa'n't nothin' but a slip of a gal when you wuz down dar, suh; an' she ain't nothin' but a slip yit, dough she ain't no chicken. She'll tell you 'erse'f dat she's forty ef dey ain't no men folks 'roun', an' I speck ef you'd put ane'r year er two on ter dat you wouldn't miss it so mighty fur."

Miss Puss's Parasol

She paused and laughed silently, as if enjoying some thought of her own which she could not afford to divulge. Then, after a while—"Dey ain't no needs ter ax you ef you knows Jedge Ballard, kaze he wuz done dar an' well seasoned long 'fo' you ever had de idee er comin' ter dat town. I dunner what make um call 'im Jedge, kaze he ain't never jedge nothin' not sence I been knowin' 'im. I up an' axed Marse Tumlin one day how come dey call dat man Jedge, an' he say it's bekaze he got sech a keen eye fer hoss-flesh; but Marse Tumlin won't never talk sense ter me, not less'n dey's trouble on han'. Well, anyhow, dey ain't nothin' wrong 'bout de Jedge but de entitlements, an' dat ain't much, kaze dey's men by de dozen down dar whar we-all live at, an' dey calls um Maje an' Gener'l an' Colonel, an' lots un um ain't never smelt gunpowder whar dey's any fightin' gwine on.

"But dat ar Jedge Ballard, he went to war, an' dey say he fit right up ter de las' minnit. Dat what dey say, but one thing I know

The Making of a Statesman

mighty well—ef de Yankees had 'a' been wimmen folks de Jedge would 'a' broke an' run 'fo' dey fire a gun, an' he'd 'a' been runnin' yit ef dey'd give chase attter 'im. De reason er dat, I speck, is kaze he come ter town a country chap, way back yander befo' de war, an' whirled inter makin' his livin' by clerkin' in a grocery sto' whar dey had dram fer ter sell. De reason I know 'bout dat is bekaze he useter gi' me a thimbleful now an' den when I'd patch his cloz fer 'im er put buttons on his pants. He live wid de man he clerk fer, an' de man had gals, but de Jedge useter have all his meals sent ter de sto' ceppin' on Sundays, an' den he'd take his foot in his han' an' go home fer ter see his folks. In dat way, he never wuz flung wid de wimmen folks much, an' it got so attter while dat he wouldn't go whar dey wuz nohow you could fix it. I know, suh, fer I done his washin' fum de day dat he had ter pay fer it wid his own money.

“ It's de trufe, suh—in my day an' time I've seed lots er men skeer'd er wimmen, an' good

Miss Puss's Parasol

men, too, but I ain't never see no man ez bad skeer'd un um ez dat ar Jedge Ballard. He wuz a mighty shy man natchally, an' den he dealt out dram, an' his daddy ain't had no niggers—all dem things drappin' tergedder kinder made it wuss'n it moughter been. You know yo'se'f, suh, how we-all useter feel 'bout folks what ain't got no fambly, ez you may say, ner no niggers. De feelin' wuz dar, an' 'twuz bleedge ter show itse'f. I know mighty well I had it strong in me, an' 'tain't all gone yit—no, bless you! 'tain't all gone yit.

“ Well, dar he wuz, ma'am, shy ez a did-apper, an' hidin' out an' runnin' 'roun' corners fer ter keep fum meetin' de wimmen folks, makin' money right along, an' wid nobody ter spen' it on. An' den dar wuz Miss Puss, age-in' a little maybe, but none ter hurt, an' a monstus fine 'oman she is, too, mighty nigh by herse'f, kaze you wouldn't hardly count her matter be alive, she so ol' an' weasly. I lookt at um, I did, an' I say ter myse'f dat dey mus' be sump'n wrong dat oughter be sot right. Dey

The Making of a Statesman

calls me a mighty meddler down home, an' I speck I is; but it look like ter me dat when I see sump'n all crossways an' slanchendicklar, I can't set still tell I try ter git it right. An' dey ain't many times, ma'am, dat I fails, ef I does say it myse'f.

“ Miss Puss is about ez skeer'd er de men ez Judge Ballard is er de wimmen. I been tellin' 'er dat she des puttin' on, but I don't speck she is, kaze you can't put on like dat, an' keep it put on when you think nobody ain't watchin' you. Wellum, ez I tell you, I been doin' de fine washin' fer bofe un um—der collars an' cuffs, der shirts an' der shirt-waists, an' fer 'bout a year now I been talkin' kinder ramblin' like—'bout Miss Puss when I'm wid de Judge, an' 'bout de Judge when I'm wid Miss Puss. One time, des ter see what de upshot un it would be, I put one er de Judge's shirts, de best one he got, in Miss Puss's bundle, an' one er Miss Puss's fine shirt-waists in de Judge's bundle, an' I slipped out fum bofe places des ez quick ez I could.

Miss Puss's Parasol

“ Dis wuz one Friday, an’ dough I know’d mighty well dat de Judge’d want his fine shirt fer Sunday, an’ dat Miss Puss’d have a duck fit ’bout her waist, I never went nigh um tell de next Monday mornin’; an’ I sorter hung back den, kaze I wanted ter have um stirred up. I went after Miss Puss’s cloze fust, an’ she, stidder bein’ mad, wuz in a mighty good humor. I howdied wid ’er, an’ axed ef her cloze wuz all ready, an’ she ’low dey wuz. When I went in ’er room, de fust thing I seed wuz de Judge’s shirt on de foot er ’er bed. I say, ‘ Well! dis knocks me, Miss Puss; whar you git ’im an’ what his name?’ She make out she dunner what I’m a-talkin’ ’bout, but she can’t fool me —dey wuz des a hint er red in her face dat I ain’t never see dar befo’. Den I ’low, ‘ Well, ef dis don’t bang my time! Here one er Judge Ballard’s best shirts, an’ I b’lieve in my soul, Miss Puss, dat you been tryin’ it on!’ Wellum, she got dat red in de face dat her own ma wouldn’t ’a’ hardly know’d ’er. She sing out, she did, ‘ Why, Aunt Minervy Ann, you

The Making of a Statesman

oughter be 'shame er yo'se'f ter have sech talk ez dat right befo' my face.' I say, 'Des look at de shirt fer you'se'f; ef somebody ain't been a-projickin' wid it I'll eat it widout salt.' "

Aunt Minervy Ann paused to laugh at the recollection of Miss Puss's discomfiture. Then she went on: "Wellum, her face got red ez a beet—I didn't know she had dat much blood in 'er. She say, 'I did spread it out, Aunt Minervy Ann, but dat wuz bekaze I didn't know what kinder gyarment it wuz—but ez fer tryin' it on—oh, I think you ought ter be 'shame er yo'se'f!' I 'low: 'Well, you nee'nter 'buze me, Miss Puss, kaze I ain't never tried to put it on. I speck I'll hatter wash it an' do it up ag'in. Jedge Ballard mighty pertickler 'bout his shirts, yit he's got nuff ter len' a dozen out eve'y week.' Miss Puss look like her feelin's wuz hurt; she say, 'Aunt Minervy Ann, I didn't do a blessid thing ter dat shirt, ceppin' ter sew a button on de front dar whar dey wa'n't na'er one.' I 'low: 'Button! why, honey, dey don't use buttons on dem kinder

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Miss Puss's Parasol

shirts; de Jedge is got some little gold studs he puts in dar stidder buttons.'

"Wellum, wid one thing an' anudder, I kept de blood in Miss Puss's face all de time I stayed dat day. She want ter take de button off, but I told her dat I'd take it off myse'f, an' den I ax 'er ef she ain't miss sump'n out her washin', an' she say she ain't. But dat started her, an' she sarched 'roun'. Bimeby, she turned 'roun' wid her han's raise—'O Aunt Minervy Ann,' she say, 'my fine waist! It's gone!' I 'low: 'Well, you kin make you' min' easy 'bout dat waist. It's in Jedge Ballard's washin', an' I bet you he wore it roun' all day yistiddy.' Dat wuz de last splinter dat made de load too heavy. Miss Puss put 'er han's 'fo' her face, an' come mighty nigh cryin'! 'Ef he did,' she say, 'don't fetch it in dis house.' I 'low, 'I'll ax 'im ef he did, an' ef he say yes, I'll take de waist an' w'ar it myse'f, dough I'll hatter let it out a little in places.' Wid dat, I wuz fer whippin' out, an' goin' on 'bout my business, but Miss Puss cotch me 'fo' I could

The Making of a Statesman

git out'n de house; she say: 'Aunt Minervy Ann! don't you dast ter say a word ter Judge Ballard 'bout dat waist. It's bad nuff ez 'tis, widout makin' it wuss.'

"I des had ter pull 'way fum Miss Puss de bes' way I kin widout hurtin' her feelin's, kaze ef I'd 'a' looked at 'er I'd 'a' bust out laughin', an' she wouldn't 'a' know'd what I wuz laughin' at no mo' dan a little bits er baby. Whilst I wuz laughin' myse'f mighty nigh ter death, who should I meet but Judge Ballard? He say, 'I saw you, Minervy Ann, an' I 'lowed maybe you wuz gwine atter my washin', an' so I come 'cross de squar' fer ter gi' you de key er my room.' I say, 'You better come go dar wid me, kaze we got big business on our han's. I put one er your shirts in Miss Puss's washin', an' one er her waists in yone; an' fum de way Miss Puss gwine on, it'll be ez much ez we kin do fer ter keep down a scandal.' He 'low: 'A scandal? What in de name er goodness does you mean, Minervy Ann?' I say, 'I means dis, suh, dat Miss Puss done got it in 'er head

Miss Puss's Parasol

dat you put it in my min' fer ter change de pieces—dat what I mean, suh.' He stop right still in de street, an' look at me des like he been pairlyzed. I say, 'I done fix it all right, an' you nee'nter worry; but I had a time!'

"Worry!—why, dat man stood dar right in his tracks an' sweat same ez ef he'd 'a' run two mile. He say: 'Minervy Ann, why in de worl' do Miss Gresham think dat I'd be so unpolite ez ter git you ter put one er my shirts in her washin'? In among my things I found some kind er conflutement dat de wimmen w'ar—now s'posin' I wuz ter git de idee in my head dat Miss Gresham swaded you ter put it in dar; what's she think?' I 'low, 'Well, suh, fer all you know, you'd be guessin' right.' He say, 'Minervy Ann, what under de sun does you mean?' I say: 'Ef I wuz ter tell you what I mean, you wouldn't know no more about it dan you does right now. You don't know ez much 'bout wimmen folks now ez you did when you wuz a baby. Don't you worry 'bout Miss Puss, kaze when I left de house she wuz

The Making of a Statesman

laughin'! She say dat atter you git done wid her shirt-waist, she'll be glad ter have it back ag'in. I up an' told dat you had it on at church Sunday.'

"Den de Jedge, he turn red an' sorter laugh. He say, 'Why, Minervy Ann, I didn't go ter church Sunday.' I 'low: 'Pity you didn't; you'd 'a' seed Miss Puss dar, an', I tell you, she looks scrumptious.'"

The lady of the house appeared to be very much interested in this recital. She laughed as Aunt Minervy Ann paused. Being a woman, she could appreciate the tactics which the old negress had put into operation.

"Wellum," continued Aunt Minervy Ann, now addressing herself altogether to the lady, "I went ter Jedge Ballard's room wid 'im, an' got de waist an' tuck it back ter Miss Puss. I declar', ma'am, you oughter des 'a' been dar fer ter see de way she went on—she fluttered 'roun' me same ez a chicken wid its head wrung off. It wuz, 'O Aunt Minervy Ann, what'd you tell 'im?' an', 'O Aunt Minervy Ann,

Miss Puss's Parasol

what did he say?' But I done had it all made up in my min' what I gwine ter tell 'er, an' so atter she tuck de waist an' look it all over fer ter see what de man done gone an' done ter't, I stood dar, I did, an' hol' up my han's in a great 'miration.

"She look at me, she did, an' she fluttered an' quivered same ez ef I was gwine ter take 'er ter de calaboose. I 'low: 'Miss Puss, I des wish you could 'a' been wid me des now!—no, I don't, nudder, kase you'd 'a' des flew'd up an' got mad when dey wa'n't no 'casion fer ter git mad. I went ter de Jedge, an' I ax 'im ef he got any stray gyarments 'mongst his things; an' he make answer dat he know'd right pine-blank what I come fer—dessó! Den he open his trunk, an' he fish dat waist fum de bottom—an' look at it! Dey ain't a mark ner a wrinkle on it ceppin' dem what I put on it myse'f. He ax me who de waist b'long ter, an' I tol 'im dat 'twon't do no good ef he know'd, an' dat he better not make bad matters wuss. Den he say he kin guess, an' I 'low dat he kin

The Making of a Statesman

guess all he wanten, kaze I ain't gwineter tell 'im an' git deeper inter trouble dan what I wuz.' Miss Puss, she say, 'Oh, I'm so thankful you didn't tell 'im Aunt Minervy Ann—but did he guess?'"

Aunt Minervy Ann paused again to laugh, and this time her small audience laughed with her, not so much at what she said as at the curious way in which, by gestures of the hand, by movements of the head and body, and by the tones of her voice, she managed to give us an accurate portrait of Miss Puss Gresham—qualities that are all absent from this dull report.

"'But did he guess?' she went on, mimicking the voice and manner of Miss Puss. I 'low, 'Yes'm, he guessed, an' he guess right de fust time. He say, dat ef de waist b'long ter anybody in de town, it b'longs ter Miss Gresham.' Miss Puss cry out, 'Why, Aunt Minervy Ann! how could he 'a' know'd?' I say, 'Dat what pestered me, Miss Puss, an' I ax 'im what make he call your name so pat. He say he ain't bleege ter tell me, but he don't min'

Miss Puss's Parasol

it, kaze he know I ain't gwineter say nothin' 'bout it, an' den he up'n tell me a great long rigamarole 'bout how one time when we wuz all lots younger dan what we is now, he walked behime you one Sunday afternoon, an' all de way he kin smell some kinder faint perfume sorter like spice pinks, an' dat when he pick up dat waist he kin smell de same.'

"An' it's de trufe, ma'am, dat Miss Puss keeps de sweetest scents on her cloze dat any human bein' ever smelt. I dunner whar she gits um, but she's got um. Dey ain't strong; deyer so faintlike dat you dunner whedder you dremp 'bout um or not—an' you can't wash um out. You may drown de cloze in soap-suds er lye-water, an' you may rub an' wring tell you' arms ache—but when you git de cloze all i'oned an' done up, de scent'll be dar des ez strong an' no stronger."

"What did Miss Gresham say when you told her that awful fib?" the lady of the house asked. She was more interested in the practical features of the affair than she was in the

The Making of a Statesman

faint sweet smell of the carnations; but, somehow, when Aunt Minervy Ann began to describe perfume, the mind of one of her listeners flew away back to the old days when his grandmother's garden-pinks flung their faint spices on the air.

“What did she say, ma'am? Why, she like ter had a little bit er fit. She blushed like a school-gal, an' laughed like she wuz happy wid-out knowin' de rason why. She didn't know what ter say, but bimeby she hit at me wid a towel, an' 'low, ' Oh, go 'long, Aunt Minervy Ann! you must think I'm mighty silly ter b'lieve all dat.' ”

“Wellum, I went 'long, kaze I didn't want ter tell no mo' stories dan I kin he'p. I tol' Miss Vallie 'bout it, an' she tuck up wid de idee right off—you know how de wimmen folks is. An' den Marse Tumlin cotch on—he mo' like a 'oman in some er his ways dan any grown man I ever is see. When Marse Tumlin take a han' in anything, it bleedge ter show some motion; ef dey ain't no life in it, he ain't

Miss Puss's Parasol

gwineter fool wid it. So 'twa'n't so mighty long 'fo' he had matters on de move, an' he handle um, he say, des like dey wuz politics.

"De nex' Sunday de Jedge wuz in church all diked out—Miss Vallie say she didn't know dey wuz ez fine a suit er cloze in town ez dat man had on; an' Miss Puss, she had on some bran new duds. I seed her when she wuz comin' way fum church, an' she look des like a pictur' in a book; not knowin' 'er, you'd 'a' said she wa'n't a day over twenty-five, ef dat. Miss Vallie say dat de two un um would look at one an'er des like dey wuz skeer'd dey wuz committin' some great crime—stealin' glimpses like a skeer'd boy steals peaches, one at a time, an' mighty little ones at dat.

"When Marse Tumlin hear dat, he say ever'thing is ripe fer de campaign ter begin. He tol' Miss Vallie what she must do de nex' day, an', sho nuff, she done it. Ef dey wuz anything in de worl' dat de Jedge wuz special fond un, it wuz guns, an', atter guns, dogs. Dat wuz Marse Tumlin's weakness, too. Dem

The Making of a Statesman

two men 'ud go out on a drizzly day an' walk fum mornin' tell night huntin' birds, an' maybe dey'd come back at night wid one poor little pa'tridge apiece. De nex' day wuz Monday, an' 'long 'bout ten o'clock Marse Tumlin come, an' fotch Jedge Ballard wid 'im. Marse Tumlin had a new gun, an' dey got dat out, an' tuck it ter pieces; an' while dey wuz talkin' 'bout dat, Miss Vallie went thoo de hall, an' hollered an' tol' Marse Tumlin dat he nee'nter wait dinner fer her, kaze she ain't know when she comin' back.

"Wellum, she went right straight ter Miss Puss's—dey wuz mighty good frien's—an' nothin' would do but Miss Puss must come an' take dinner wid 'er, atter dey went down town fer ter do some shoppin'. Miss Vallie say she want Miss Puss ter go 'long wid 'er an' he'p 'er choose some goods, an' dat wa'n't no story needer, kaze dey wa'n't nobody in dem diggin's dat had a quicker eye fer color dan Miss Puss—I wish you could see some er de cloze dat white 'oman got. Dey ain't so mighty

Miss Puss's Parasol

fine, when dey come outer de sto', but when Miss Puss git thoo wid um, dey look like dey er de finest cloze ter be foun' anywhar—anybody'll tell you dat. When she dike herse'f out, she sho does put you in min' er de pictur's you see in books. She ain't purty like Miss Vallie, but dey's sump'n n'er 'bout dat make you feel better—she kinder rests you.

“ She couldn't git outer gwine wid Miss Vallie, an' I don't speck she tried mighty hard, kaze ef dey's anything she likes ter do it's ter fumble roun' an' fool wid de stuff dey have in de sto's. Miss Vallie dilly-dallied, an' went fum sto' ter sto' tell mighty nigh dinner-time, an' Marse Tumlin, he had de Judge busy ez a bee, tellin' him what kinder guns is de best, an' what kinder powder an' shot would do de business fer fowl an' varmint. I had my part ter play, an' I played it. I had ter have dinner on de table des 'fo' de clock struck twelve, an' 'twuz all ready at a quarter ter twelve, an' I rung de bell. De Judge start up like he wanter go on 'bout his business, ef he had any,

The Making of a Statesman

but Marse Tumlin totch 'im up wid a toddy—one er de long sweet uns dat he know how ter make—an' when de Jedge march inter de dinin'-room he lookt ez game ez one deze yer fightin' chickens.

“I wuz kinder skeer'd dat Miss Vallie'd overstay her time—you know how wimmen folks is when dey gits ter foolin' 'roun' in de sto's whar dey buys der dresses—but she come in 'fo' dey got thoo de soup, an' by dat time Marse Tumlin an' de Jedge wuz 'sputin' 'bout some kinder doin's, I dunner what; an' dey wuz so het up wid der 'pinions dat dey ain't hear Miss Vallie an' Miss Puss when dey come in, an' I had de do' shet 'twix' Miss Vallie's room an' de dinin'-room.

“Wellum, when de do' did open, I let you know de 'spute wuz cut off 'twix' de head an' de tail. Fer de time it'd take you ter count ten, dey wuz mo' stillness in dat quarter dan dey ever is ter be ag'in. Ef a bug had a-flew'd ag'in' de wall I b'lieve 'twould 'a' sounded like a cannon, an' ef I had a stuck my head in

Miss Puss's Parasol

de do' an' 'a' hollered Booh, Miss Puss an' de Jedge would 'a' bofe fainted dead away. De Jedge cotch his bref right in de middle er de biggest kinder talk, an' Miss Puss fetched a gasp—an' all dis time Marse Tumlin's eyes wuz a-dancin' des like he wuz at a circus. All dis tuck place fum de time de do' opened ter de minnit when Miss Vallie an' Marse Tumlin wuz a-fixin' matters up so de yuthers wouldn't have a word ter say ef dey didn't wanter. An' dey didn't wanter!

“ Miss Vallie, she talk ter Miss Puss, an' Marse Tumlin rattled away at de Jedge, an' 'twa'n't long 'fo' dey wuz feelin' better dan dey thought dey would. Miss Puss seed dat de Jedge wa'n't makin' no 'rangements fer ter eat her up, an' de Jedge, he seed dat 'twuz des ez easy fer ter set at de same table wid two nice wimmen ez 'twuz ter set dar wid a lot er men, specially when he ain't had ter do no talkin'. Wellum, dey couldn't 'a' fell inter better han's fer makin' um feel at home an' at der ease, an' 'twa'n't long 'fo' dey wuz all talkin' des like

The Making of a Statesman

dey had dinner terge'er eve' day. Atter dinner, Miss Vallie played on de peanner, an', fust thing you know, Miss Puss wuz singin' some kinder song 'bout tetchin' de harp gently, er sump'n n'er like dat. All I know, it 'uz mighty purty, an' de Jedge he sot dar, lookin' like he des beginnin' ter know what 'tis ter be livin'.

"I kinder had de idee dat dey'd be some trouble when de time come fer de Jedge an' Miss Puss ter go, kaze de man sot dar like somebody intranced—he didn't know what time wuz. Ef you'd 'a' axed 'im right quick whedder it wuz day or night, he couldn't 'a' told you widout lookin' out de winder. Bimeby I got a chance ter beckon ter Miss Vallie, an' I axed her not ter fling de fat in de fire by hintin' fer de Jedge fer ter walk home wid Miss Puss. I say, 'Ef dey's gwineter be any walkin' home, you go 'long wid um,' an' des dat away she fixed it.

"Wellum, all dat would 'a' been thowed away ef I hadn't 'a' thought ter steal Miss

Miss Puss's Parasol

Puss's parasol. Marse Tumlin say dat dey ain't nobody in de roun' worl' would 'a' done dat but ol' Minervy Ann, an' I speck dat's so."

"But why," asked the lady of the house, "did you steal the parasol, and what did that have to do with the Judge and Miss Gresham?"

"It come ter me all in a flash," replied Aunt Minervy Ann, with a laugh. "I des know'd in reason dat dat dinner would be de last un it, ef de Jedge ain't got some skuse fer ter call on 'er; kaze dat dinner doin's wuz des a happen so, de way she look at it."

"Wouldn't she have had enough politeness to ask the gentleman to call on her, if she had wanted him to call?" inquired the lady of the house.

"Wellum, in a case like dat, p'liteness ain't got much ter do wid it. De man ain't been a-callin' on 'er, an' dey ain't no way fer her ter know dat it'd be 'gree'ble ter him ter call. You got ter put dese shy folks by deyse'f ef you gwineter say what dey moughter done. I

The Making of a Statesman

most know Miss Puss never did ax a man fer ter call on 'er, an' ez de sayin' is, you can't larn a ol' dog new tricks. Anyhow," Aunt Minervy Ann went on, throwing her head back as if to show by the movement that she was ready to take the whole responsibility—"anyhow, I stole de parasol; they ain't no rubbin' dat out—I stole it whilst dey wuz all eatin' dinner, an' de nex' time I went attar Jedge Ballard's washin' I put it in de bottom er my basket, an' I tuck de fust good chance when he wa'n't lookin' to slip it out an' lean it in de cornder by de bureau. Den I put his cloze in de basket, an' des ez I start ter go I turn 'roun', I did, an' say, 'Jedge Ballard, ain't dat Miss Puss's parasol?' He look at me like he thought I 'uz crazy. I 'low, 'Dat parasol right dar—ain't dat de one dat she been makin' sech a parade 'bout, ez ef dey wa'n't na'er nudder parasol in de Nunited State?'

"Wellum, when he see dat parasol, it look like he got so weak dat he'd 'a' fell down eff a breff er win' had blow'd 'gin 'im. He look

Miss Puss's Parasol

at me, an' den he look at de parasol, an' he say: 'Minervy Ann, I ain't never lay eyes on dat thing befo'—I'll take my oath on it. How in de heav'm's name could it 'a' got in here?' I 'low: 'Well, it didn't come yer by itse'f, sho; I been livin' a mighty long time, an' I ain't never see no parasol git up an' walk. De way I look at it, you must 'a' picked it up when you wuz at our house t'er day—you picked it up maybe ter han' it ter Miss Puss, er maybe ter tote it fer 'er, an' you got ter thinkin' 'bout business er sump'n, an' fergot all about it.' He look at me, an' den he look at de parasol, an' he say: 'Ef I did I must be losin' my min'. Minervy Ann, kin I git you ter take it ter Miss Gresham?' I 'low: 'Dat you can't—dat you can't! Dey'd say right off dat ol' Minervy Ann tried to steal Miss Puss's parasol an' got skeer'd an' tuck it back. Oh, no! I'm too ol' fer ter run my head in dat kinder trap! Whyn't you take it back yo'se'f? You don't want no better skuse dan dat fer callin' on Miss Puss. Dat des what you need—you been

The Making of a Statesman

runnin' fum de wimmen so long dat you got scales on you!"

"Ef you'd 'a' seed dat white man when I say dat, suh," said Aunt Minervy Ann, looking at me, "you'd 'a' laughed yo'se'f ter death. He turn roun' an' look at hisse'f in de glass. 'Scales, Minervy Ann—scales!' Dey ain't nothin' funnier in dis worl' dan some er de men folks. I 'low, 'I ain't talkin' 'bout scales on yo' body; I'm talkin' 'bout scales on yo' min' an' manners.'

"Wellum"—Aunt Minervy Ann turned again to the lady of the house—"de parasol done de work. I went right straight an' tol' Miss Puss dat de Jedge had her parasol, an' she look at me in de funniest kinder way—des like a little gal does when you ketch um in some kinder mischief—an' den she laugh, an' ax me what I reckon de Jedge want wid it. I say I speck he want sump'n ter 'member her by. Well, de Jedge, he put off takin' dat parasol back fer de longest, but, bimeby, de day 'fo' las' Christmus, he mustered up sperrit nuff

